

## Seton Hall University eRepository @ Seton Hall

---

Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses  
(ETDs)

Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses

---

2013

# A Study of Assistant Principals' Perceptions of the Principalship and their Career Aspirations

James DeWitt Oliver III

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Oliver, James DeWitt III, "A Study of Assistant Principals' Perceptions of the Principalship and their Career Aspirations" (2013). *Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs)*. 1924.  
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/1924>

A STUDY OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
PRINCIPALSHIP AND THEIR CAREER ASPIRATIONS

BY

James DeWitt Oliver III

Dissertation Committee:

Anthony Colella, Ph.D., Mentor  
Kathleen Pecoraro Ed.D., Reader  
Barbara Strobert, Ed.D., Reader

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education  
Seton Hall University

2013

**SETON HALL UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES  
OFFICE OF GRADUATES STUDIES**

**APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENCE**

Doctoral Candidate, **James DeWitt Oliver III**, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during the **Spring Semester 2013**.

**DISSERTATION COMMITTEER**  
(PLEASE SIGN AND DATE BESIDE YOUR NAME)

Mentor:

Dr. Anthony Colella

Committee Member:

Dr. Barbara Strobert

Committee Member

Dr. Kathleen Pecoraro

The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate's file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.

© Copyright James DeWitt Oliver III, 2013

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

The importance of attracting, selecting, and retaining effective principals is essential. Due to the negative perceptions of the principalship, there are concerns about who will fill these vacancies. Therefore, this study focused on perceptions of second and third year assistant principals toward the principalship and their career aspirations.

The following research questions guided this study: (a) How do assistant principals perceive the role of the principal? (b) What are the factors that influence assistant principals' motivation to seek or not to seek a position as a school principal?

The research design used a qualitative approach to ascertain in-depth information to describe assistant principals' perceptions and motivations. One focus group session was held and nine in-depth phone interviews were conducted. The participants consisted of second year assistant principals in the "New Jersey Leaders To Leaders" program (L2L) and assistant principals who had just completed the L2L program requirements.

The findings of this study indicated that 83% of the participants had aspirations of pursuing a principalship. The principalship was described as being a difficult job due to time requirements and responsibilities of dealing with difficult parents, personnel decisions, politics and discipline, while keeping constant communication and managing the day-to-day operations. Taking the next step, having positive experiences as an assistant principal, having leadership aspirations to make a difference, financial incentives and growing as an administrator were described as motivating factors for pursuing a principalship.

Due to the finding that 91.6% of the assistant principals who participated in this study were from one of the top three DFG classifications in New Jersey, it is recommended that a research study be done to analyze and compare school district

philosophy based on DFG. The experiences assistant principals have due to the school and/or their principal's leadership style were indicated as impacting motivations for career advancement. It is recommended that a large-scale quantitative study be done to describe the effects on assistant principals' aspirations to pursue a principalship due to their experiences working as assistant principals.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been lucky to always be surrounded by true educational leaders. I believe there is something to learn from all people you encounter in life. This has remained true throughout the process of writing this dissertation.

Dr. Pecoraro, thank you for being my mentor as an assistant principal and for your support as one of my committee members. I cannot express how much your guidance means to me. You are a true friend and mentor. One of my goals is to someday be the mentor you are to me for other future school administrators. I will always remember what it means to have “Stick-to-itiveness” because of you.

Dr. Colella, I want to thank you for possessing your easygoing attitude and calm demeanor throughout this process. You were always very supportive and encouraging, and I thank you for that. I would also like to thank Dr. Strobert for the recommendations you provided. It has been a pleasure working with both of you throughout this process.

I would also like to thank, Dr. Schaller for your support and willingness to go above and beyond any expectations.

## DEDICATION

My wife Carrie, I know this process was difficult for both of us and I thank you for the support you showed me and sticking by my side as I decided to go back for yet another degree. Knowing that you were there for me helped keep me focused. I will never forget the day I was taking a final during my last class of summer 2012 when you called to tell me the news that you were on your way to the hospital to deliver our son James. That drive to the hospital was the start of the happiest moment in my life. I look forward to having more time to spend with you and our family.

James D. Oliver IV and future children who enter our loving family, always remember that dedication and hard work pays off—you can do anything, all you need is determination.

Mom and Dad, you have always believed in me and supported me throughout my life and I cannot thank you enough for this. I would not be where I am today if it wasn't for your determination and guidance.

Dave and Tricia, thank you for being two of the most important friends I have. I have always looked up to both of you throughout my life.

J.D.O. III



## TABLE OF CONTENETS

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Dedication.....	vii
List of Tables.....	x
Chapter	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Guiding Questions.....	9
Conceptual Framework.....	9
Design and methodology.....	11
Significant of the Study.....	14
Limitations of the Study.....	16
Delimitations of the Study.....	17
Definitions of Terms.....	17
Summary.....	18
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	19
Introduction.....	19
Review of Literature Search Methods.....	19
Limitations of the Review.....	20
Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Literature.....	21
Role of the Assistant Principal.....	21
Role of the Principal.....	22
Principal Shortage.....	27
Reluctant Principal Candidates.....	30
Conceptual Framework.....	32
Other Dissertations.....	34
Summary.....	40
III METHODOLOGY.....	41
Background.....	42
Design.....	42
Sampling.....	44
Profile of the Participants.....	46
Setting.....	48
Data Collection.....	48

	Data Analysis.....	49
	Validity and Reliability.....	50
	Limitations of the Study.....	51
	Delimitations of the Study.....	51
	Summary.....	52
IV	FINDINGS.....	53
	Introduction.....	53
	Data Analysis.....	53
	Background Information.....	54
	Data Findings.....	55
	Summary.....	99
V	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	104
	Introduction.....	104
	Summary of the Findings.....	104
	Discussion.....	106
	Recommendations.....	119
	Conclusions.....	122
	References.....	124
	Appendix A: Focus Group and Interview Script and Questions.....	133
	Appendix B: Transcripts .....	136

## List of Tables

Table 1	Description of Principal Roles as School Leaders (Rallis & Goldring, 2003)
Table 2:	New Jersey School Districts per DFG
Table 3:	Focus Group Session A with Second Year Assistant Principal
Table 4:	Interviews with Second Year Assistant Principals in L2L
Table 5:	Interviews with Assistant Principals who Just Completed L2L
Table 6:	Depicts the themes associated with each interview question.
Table 7:	Interview Question 1 Themes
Table 8:	Interview Question 2 Themes
Table 9:	Interview Question 3 Themes
Table 10:	Interview Question 4 Themes
Table 11:	Interview Question 5 Themes
Table 12:	Interview Question 6 Themes
Table 13:	Interview Question 7 Part One.
Table 14:	Interview Question Themes
Table 15:	Research Question 1 Responses by Theme
Table 16:	Research Question 2 Responses by Theme

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world. America's business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up our game. That's why we're working together to put an outstanding education within reach for every child. (President Barack Obama, July 18, 2011)

A national spotlight is on improving our educational system. As President Barack Obama stated, "We need to up our game," many Americans do not have faith in the education system. This has directed much attention towards reforming classroom instruction, curriculum, assessment and teacher and principal evaluations. Reforms to our education system call for principals who are educational leaders, and when they retire, they need to be replaced with qualified candidates. The Wallace Foundation indicated, "principal leadership as among the most pressing matters on a list of issues in public school education" (2012, p. 3). The 2008 Educational School Policy Standards (author, year?) indicate that a principal's responsibility is "setting directions" (p. 9). This is the area "educational leaders have the greatest impact, as the goals and sense of purpose they provide strengthens the entire staff. Strong educational leaders also attract, retain, and get the most out of talented teachers" (ISLLC, 2008, p. 9).

The importance of attracting, selecting, and retaining effective principals is essential. "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Washlstrom, 2004). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty conducted an analysis of 69 studies involving 2,802 schools, nearly 1.4 million students, and 14,000 teachers. In their text, *School Leadership that Works From Research to Results*, they identified that principal

leadership behavior at the school level has a correlation of .25 with average student achievement. This indicates that, if an average principal (50th percentile in leadership ability) is hired at an average school (50th percentile of student academic achievement), “over time we would predict the average achievement of the school to remain at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile” (p. 10). If the leadership abilities of the principal increased by one standard deviation, (from the 50th to the 84th percentile) the correlation of .25 would indicate that over time “average student achievement of the school to rise to the 60th percentile” (p. 10). If the principal’s leadership ability increased from 50th percentile to 99<sup>th</sup> percentile, over time “the average student achievement of the school to raise to the 72nd percentile” (p. 10). The researchers determined that, “A highly effective school leader can have a dramatic influence on the overall academic achievement of students” (p. 10).

The impact a principal has on a school is known. The question is, when principals retire, who will fill these vacant positions? Gene Bottoms (2011), Senior Vice President of the Southern Regional Education Board wrote,

Each year, one-fifth of the principals in our nation’s public schools leave their jobs. Their departure creates more than 18,000 vacancies at the critical core of our K-12 education enterprise: school-level leadership. Anyone with a basic understanding of how schools function today knows that these vacant positions must be filled without delay. But who is next? Who will ensure that each of these 18,000 schools moves toward higher levels of performance? And where will school districts find these people? (p. i)

The concern of “Who’s next?” is related to the desirability of the principalship. Shelton (2010) reported about how the role of building manager has changed to

instructional leader. This was due to the “new and greater challenges, including increased accountability for student academic achievement; complex social environments that reflect the nation’s ever-changing economic, racial and ethnic diversity; and a constantly changing educational landscape with new technology and limited re-sources” (Shelton, 2010, p. 4). In a 2003 report for the Wallace Foundation, Mitgang (year) described how these added responsibilities of the principalship have become increasingly challenging, making the job thankless, and less enticing,

Never before has the bar been set so high for America’s public education system to ensure that every child achieves at high levels...Never have public schools counted more heavily on the nation’s nearly 84,000 principals to lead the instructional improvements needed to meet tough new state and federal mandates. Never has the resulting need to assure an adequate supply of candidates for school leadership positions been clearer. (2003, p. 1)

The principal controls the most important factors that affect the quality of a school. These include the hiring, supervising, and retaining of highly qualified teachers (Harris, Rutledge, Ingle, & Thompson, 2006). With the emphasis on accountability and the ever-growing demands of the principal, our schools must attract candidates who are qualified to be much more than building managers. The need to attract these candidates is a concern because fewer educators are deciding to pursue administration due to the view of the career as being less desirable than it once was (Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002).

The 2000 report by the Task Force on the Principalship on Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship funded by the United States Department of

Education stated, “many people believe that a scarcity of capable education leaders ranks among the most severe of the problems. Without strong leaders, schools have little chance of meeting any other challenge” (p. 1). The report also states the first priority of the principal must be “leadership for learning.” The authors feel the current role of principal is one of a “middle management position...over loaded with responsibilities for basic building operations” (p. 1). This over loaded job description allows “schools to drift without any clear vision of leadership for learning or providing principals with the skills needed to meet the challenge” (p. 1). In order for our schools to succeed in the 21st century, essential duties of the principal were outlined. “The schools of the 21st century will require a new kind of principal, one whose role will be defined in terms of,

- **Instructional leadership** that focuses on strengthening teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making and accountability;
- **Community leadership** manifested in a big-picture awareness of the school’s role in society; shared leadership among educators, community partners and residents; close relations with parents and others; and advocacy for school capacity building and resources; and
- **Visionary leadership** that demonstrates energy, commitment, entrepreneurial spirit, values and conviction that all children will learn at high levels, as well as inspiring others with this vision both inside and outside the school building. (p. 4)

This push for accountability holds school administrators responsible for the overall school improvement, which is measured by standardized assessments. The No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) has been described as the most sweeping reform of federal education in nearly 40 years. NCLB requires all states receiving federal funding for education to establish accountability systems to demonstrate 100 percent student proficiency by 2014. If schools do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two years in a row, they are labeled as needing improvement and face severe sanctions.

**Position Opening: School Principal, Anytown School District.**

Qualifications:

Wisdom of a sage, vision of a CEO, intellect of a scholar, leadership of a point guard, compassion of a counselor, moral strength of a nun, courage of a firefighter, craft knowledge of a surgeon, political savvy of a senator, toughness of a soldier, listening skills of a blind man, humility of a saint, collaborative skills of an entrepreneur, certitude of a civil rights activist, charisma of a stage performer, and patience of job. Salary lower than you might expect. Credentials required. For application materials, contact....(Copland, 2001, p. 528)

With the current job requirements of the principal, many feel the job description provided above is not far off. This perception may limit potential applicants from applying to become a principal, thus, shrinking the pool of qualified candidates. The authors of “Lost Luster”, Pounder and Merrill (2001), interviewed two assistant principals to gather their perceptions of the principalship. One assistant principal said,

I’d like to be a high school principal because I know I can make a difference in kids’ lives and in my school, but I wouldn’t want to do it for more than three to five years. The demands of the job are just too great—the time commitment, the stress and the difficulty in implementing change due to organizational, political



and legal constraints...I'm not willing to ask my family to make the sacrifices for an extended period of time. The personal impact of high-stress job that takes me away from my family three or more nights a week is a high price to pay for career advancement...In a world of increasing violence, racial divisions and tensions, federal and state regulations and increasing public accountability, is it possible to be an effective and successful school leader? Everyone seems to want a piece of the principal and as I look at the big picture I have to ask, "Is it worth it?" (para. 4)

Whether the perceptions are valid or not, there are concerns that there is a lack of qualified candidates willing to advance to principal due to the negative perceptions that exist. In "The Maine Principal Study" (2005), Buckingham, Donaldson, and Marnik reported, "the job appears to take a toll on those who did it – undoubtedly a disincentive for continuing in the position for incumbent principals and a disincentive for taking on the work for talented teachers" (p. 7). These perceptions affect aspirations of future school leaders. If the role of principal is viewed as too stressful and one that leads to burnout, the next generation of potential school leaders may choose alternative career paths, thus shrinking the pool of educational leaders needed to effect the changes and mandates that are being and will continue to be imposed on public schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) projected that educational administrative job openings would grow by eight percent between 2008 and 2018 due to increased administrative job responsibilities and a large number of expected retirements.

Principals are now being held more accountable for the performance of students and teachers, while at the same time they are required to adhere to a growing number of government regulations. In addition, overcrowded classrooms, safety issues, budgetary concerns, and teacher shortages in some areas are creating additional stress for administrators. Many teachers feel that the increase in pay for becoming an administrator is not high enough to compensate for the greater responsibilities. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

If there are ample job opportunities and an increase of reluctant highly qualified educational leaders willing to apply for a principalship, the pool of qualified candidates will continue to shrink. I raise the concern of who will be the future building principals. With the push of accountability and the ever-growing demands of the principalship, our schools need strong instructional leaders. Thus, through this study I sought to describe the perceptions assistant principals hold in regards to the role of the principal to determine how perceptions impact assistant principals' aspirations for career advancement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship and their aspirations for career advancement. Specifically, I sought to answer the following research question: *To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the principal impact assistant principals' perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations?*

In reviewing the literature, it was apparent that concerns about a possible shortage of principals have existed for many years. The purpose of this study came from

the lack of qualitative research on assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship and their aspirations for career advancement. If the assistant principal position is a training ground for principal, and assistant principals do not apply for principal positions, from where will the future building leaders come? Does the negative perception of the job requirements of the principal reduce the candidate pool, thereby lowering the quality of potential applicants? Will our future school leaders lack the knowledge that should have been obtained training as an assistant principal?

I currently work as an assistant principal in an elementary school. Most of the teachers hold one or two masters degrees in education. The reason they continue to pursue higher education is the desire to increase their salary. During the time of this study several of the teachers held or were seeking degrees in administration, but none of them were interested in pursuing a career as a principal. When asked why, the most common response was based on their perception of the job not being attractive.

The University of Arkansas conducted "The Status of School Leadership in Arkansas Study" (Carnie, Denny, Hewitt & Pijanowski, 2008). The intent of the study was to determine if there was a shortage of school leaders and, if so, what were the causes. The participants for this study consisted of one hundred and ninety seven superintendents and 397 teachers identified as leaders who were not interested in administration were surveyed. The top reasons for not pursuing the principalship included testing and accountability pressures, high stress, high time commitment, social problems, demands of parents and community, insufficient salary, low funding of schools, the principalship not being as satisfying as in the past, bad press, and job security.

According to Reed and Conners (1982), since 1926 most of the existing research asked the same or similar questions, What is the role of the vice principal? What is the relationship of this role to other site administrators, and how is it related to the organization as a whole? In reviewing the literature, it is evident that attention is starting to be focused on the factors that inhibit the pursuit of the position of principal. The majority of research conducted is quantitative in nature, and it utilized surveys to collect data. This does not provide the in-depth analysis needed to gain insight into perceptions. In order to collect this data, I utilized a qualitative approach to provide elaboration on the topic of assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship and describe if it correlates to their aspiration and motivations for career advancement.

### **Research Guiding Questions**

In answering the problem statement, the primary research question was: To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the principal impact assistant principals' perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations?

The following guiding questions assisted in answering the primary research question:

1. How do assistant principals perceive the role of the principal?
2. What are the factors that influence assistant principals motivation to seek or not seek a position as a school principal?

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Merriam (2009), a researcher conducting a qualitative research study is focused on "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their words, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall is to *understand* how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (p. 23). In order

to conduct this research, I used the phenomenological approach as a lens to analyze the primary research question, To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the principal impact assistant principals' perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations? "The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation" (Lester, 1999, para. 1).

"Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals" (Lester, 1999, para. 3). Perceptions one holds are internalized and become their reality, which influences their behavior. This is why a study on the perceptions assistant principals' hold toward the role of principal is important. The use of the phenomenology approach "does not dictate to phenomena but rather it wants to understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and the elucidation of this process is a descriptive task" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 6). Describing the perceptions assistant principals hold can provide a valid indicator of beliefs (motivations and aspirations) in regard to the job of principalship.

Merleau-Ponty (2005) stated, "the world is what we perceive" (p. xviii). It is these perceptions that are sought to describe how assistant principals perceive the role of the principal. "To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth" (Merleau-Ponty, p. xviii). The perceptions one holds are continuously developed and transform through the experiences one has in life. "The world is not what I think, but what I live through" (Merleau-Ponty, p. xviii). Based on assistant principals' experiences and exchanges with principals, perceptions are developed. It was the goal of this study to provide rich data to describe assistant

principals perceptions of the principalship. “Because the world of human experience is ambiguous, frames of reference shape how situations are defined and determine what actions take place...learning from experience often plays a more powerful role than formal education” (Gaziel, 2003, p. 477).

Theories of motivation are also an important lens for this study. If an individual is motivated to advance to a higher level, his or her perceptions can motivate them to take different career paths. In the pursuit of studying perception, Clayton Alderfer’s (1969) existence, relatedness, growth (ERG) theory, which is based on Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, was also used as a lens for this study. Alderfer’s ERG classifies needs into three groups (existence, relatedness, and growth) and suggests that people pursue individual or multiple needs simultaneously and when a higher need is not met (growth), they focus on lower needs (relatedness and existence).

David McClelland’s Theory of Needs (1961) was also used as a lens for this study. McClelland’s theory proposes that needs are acquired as a result of the experiences an individual has over time. He defined three groups of needs (achievement, affiliation, and power) that impact a person’s motivation and job effectiveness. Assistant principals develop perceptions of the principalship as they interact and observe principals. These perceptions can impact their motivations and aspirations for career advancement.

### **Design and Methodology**

In order to address the research questions of this study, I conducted a focus group session and held in-depth interviews with assistant principals working in New Jersey who were enrolled in their second year as residents in the New Jersey Leaders To

Leaders program (NJL2L) and assistant principals who had just completed the NJL2L program. New Jersey requires all individuals who hold a Certificate of Eligibility for principal to participate in the 2-year Leaders To Leaders program, which provides mentoring and evaluations from a state approved mentor (<http://www.njl2l.org>). For the purpose of this study, all participants were in their second year or had just completed the Leaders To Leaders program. This ensured all assistant principals had at least one and a half years working and interacting with a principal. This study was designed to ascertain perceptions, motivations, and aspirations of assistant principals.

School districts in New Jersey are classified by their district factor grouping (DFG) based on the socioeconomic status (SES) of the citizens in each school district. There are eight DFGs (A, B, CD, DE, FG, GH, I, J) in New Jersey. DFG A has the lowest SES compared to J, which has the highest SES. There were 590 school districts in New Jersey during the time of this research study. The sampling method used in this study was a type of purposeful sampling. I divided the DFGs into three groups, low (A, B, CD), middle (DE, FG), and high (GH, I, J) and was originally interested in randomly sampling six assistant principals in their second year of the Leaders To Leaders program from each of the three groups. Due to a limited number of participant responses, I included assistant principals who had just completed the Leaders To Leaders program. Due to scheduling conflicts and a low participation rate, I was only able to organized one focus group session and held nine in-depth interviews.

I utilized the purposeful sampling technique to select potential participants for this research study. The goal was to structure a study to provide rich data to describe assistant principals' perceptions. The use of purposeful sampling "is based on the

assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). In selecting the participants for this study, the intent was to use the technique of maximum variation. Merriam describes maximum variation as a purposeful sampling technique that involves “identifying and seeking out those who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics of interest for the study” (2009, p 79). Due to the limited variance of participants from the different DFGs in New Jersey, this study did not provide a maximum variation of assistant principals.

The qualitative research method design utilizing a focus group session and in-depth interviews was used to ascertain in-depth information to describe assistant principal perceptions of the principalship and their career aspirations and motivations for career advancement. Due to the low return rate and scheduling conflicts, only one focus group session was conducted. There were nine in-depth phone interviews. The use of semi-structured interview questions was used to seek participant responses to the interview questions. This interview format allowed for a greater exploration of participant responses. As Merriam (2009) stated, “interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured. Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 90). Because each of the participating assistant principals perceives life differently, the questions used to gather their perceptions needed to be open-ended.

In constructing the interview script, I utilized Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey’s website and their text, *Focus Groups A Practical Guide for Applied Research (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)* as a reference for the formulation of the interview questions. In



order to ensure validity for this research study, following the construction of the interview questions, I had a jury of experts (three principals) from DFG J review the interview questions. After gathering suggestions from the jury of experts, I made a change in the order of the questions. To check for question reliability, I conducted a pilot focus group of assistant principals in DFG J and held two pilot in-depth interviews with assistant principals in DFG J before conducting the focus group session or interviews for this study. Ninety one and six-tenths percent of the participating assistant principals in this study were from one of the top three DFG classifications in New Jersey. Only one participant was from the low DFG category group.

To further ensure reliability, I offered to email the transcriptions to all participants to ensure accuracy. Only one of the participants asked to have his transcript sent to him. Following this, I used a coding method to consolidate and reduce the data. “Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data...and interpreting what people said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). Coding the transcriptions allowed me to breakdown the information to identify consistencies in the data. Following the analysis of the transcriptions, I created a document that summarized the findings to capture the similarities and contrasts of the participant responses (Krueger, & Casey, 2000). The inductive process of data analysis and interpretation of the transcripts raised further questions, which could be utilized for further research studies.

### **Significance of the Study**

There have been few empirical studies that addressed the principal shortage even though there is a concern to attract highly qualified principal candidates (Howley,

Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005). Through a literature review, I did not find any study conducted in New Jersey focused on the career aspirations of assistant principals. With the current environment of education, I conducted a research study of New Jersey assistant principal perceptions of the principalship. This research provided insight into assistant principals' aspirations and motivations for career advancement.

School districts, institutions and the New Jersey Leaders To Leaders program may utilize this information to further train and prepare assistant principals to become principals. "Policymakers do not pay attention to the assistant principal. They do not sponsor studies or even collect data on this position. As a result, they miss rich opportunities to make a difference" (Marshall, 2006, p. 12). This is an immense mistake because the assistant principalship is the most beneficial training ground for our future school leaders. With so much attention on accountability and holding teachers and administrators responsible for student achievement, we must pay close attention to who obtains the role of principal. In order to do this, we must first deeply understand the perceptions that exist in order to provide opportunities and experiences to further train and expose assistant principals for the duties of the principal.

This study is significant because there is a need for an in-depth description of the perceptions assistant principals hold of the principalship. With the current turbulent environment, the concern of principal shortage, and the negative perception that exists, this in-depth qualitative research study of perceptions and motivations for pursuing the principalship can be at the forefront of research. The findings of this research may be a catalyst for training and discussions held at universities, state agencies, and school districts in order to further prepare future building administrators. If the assumption of

the principalship being an impossible position flourishes, our education system will suffer.

Much of the current research does not focus on assistant principals' perceptions of the principal or their motivations and aspirations for career advancement. The position of assistant principal provides a significant opportunity to train our future school leaders. If these individuals are unwilling to advance to the next rung on the ladder, we are missing an opportunity to train the future school leaders. The relationship between the assistant principal and principal provides learning experience that cannot be obtained anywhere else. There is no better opportunity for our future principals to learn the needed skills than working as an assistant principal. If the view of the principal continues to perpetrate negative presumptions and assistant principals choose other career paths, our future schools are at risk.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The primary goal of this study was to investigate assistant principals' perceptions of the role of the principalship to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that affect career advancement decisions. The focus of perception was a limitation because perceptions are not always accurate. Another limitation identified was, qualitative research is related to subjectivity and highly susceptible to bias on the part of the researcher (Debus & Novelli, 2008). The size of this research study was also a limitation because it doesn't allow for the research findings to describe the perceptions of all assistant principals. The poor response rate of assistant principals created another limitation for this study. The assumption that all participants in the focus group session and in-depth interviews engaged honestly and provided truthful responses, but this

cannot be confirmed. The instrumentation utilized to obtain data for this research study was not perfect, which creates another limitation for this study. The analysis procedures of transcribing the focus group sessions, and coding the data was also another limitation due to the possibility of human error.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

I placed the delimitation of only selecting assistant principals who were residents in their second year or just completed the requirements of the New Jersey Leaders To Leaders program. The selection of assistant principals for this research study was done to construct a focus group session and hold in-depth interviews of participants with similar knowledge and experiences.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Assistant Principal:* This label is used to identify the role of the assistant, vice, or associate position to the principal.

*Assistant Principalship:* This term is used in regard to the role and duties of principal.

*Career Aspirations:* Ambition an assistant principal holds toward future career goals.

*District Factor Grouping (DFG):* New Jersey categorizes school districts into one of eight categories based on the socioeconomic status of the district community residents.

(A lowest, B, CD, DE, FG, GH, I, J highest)

*New Jersey Leaders To Leaders (NJL2L):* State-approved comprehensive mentoring and induction program for new school leaders.

*Motivation:* Commitment as it relates to assistant principal's interest in performing the tasks of his or her job. Enthusiasm as it relates to assistant principal's interest in pursuing a different position title.

*Principalship*: This term is used in regard to the role and duties of principal.

*Perception*: The attitude or understanding of what is being observed.

*Social Economic Status (SES)*: A person's social status based on occupation, education, income and wealth.

### **Summary**

Chapter I of this study began by describing the importance an effective principal has on student achievement and was linked to the significance of attracting high quality candidates to pursue the role of principal. Then, the chapter described the leadership qualities principals will need to possess in order to effectively lead schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This includes, instructional leadership, community leadership and visionary leadership. Following this description, the chapter outlined two examples of bureaucracy overloads, which further add to the job requirements of the principal. Next, examples of perceptions held in regards to the principalship were indicated. Whether the perceptions are valid or not, there are concerns of a lack of qualified candidates willing to advance to principal. These perceptions are the guiding force behind the statement of the problem for this study. The chapter then outlined significant studies and literature, which supported the need for conducting further qualitative research. After that, the chapter identified the research questions, provided an overview of the design and methodology, described the conceptual framework, the significance of the study, outlined the limitations and delimitations, and defined significant terms for this study. Chapter II will review the literature related to the research problem statement and guiding research questions.

## **Chapter II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The body of literature on school building administrators examines the role of assistant principal, the role of principal, principal shortage, reluctant candidates, the managerial aspects of the position, and educational leadership qualities required to be an effective school administrator. This chapter begins with a concise description of the literature search methodology used to collect the literature. Then, an overview of the limitations of the literature review and criteria for inclusion and exclusion of literature is provided. Following this, there is an examination of the current literature as it relates to the role of the assistant principal, the role of the principal, principal shortage, and reluctant principal candidates. Next, the theoretical framework of this dissertation is provided. This review focuses on theories of perception and motivation, which will be used to describe and understand assistant principals' perceptions and motivations for career advancement. Then, key dissertations that focused on the topic of assistant principal aspirations for career advancement are provided. Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided.

#### **Review of Literature Search Methods**

To collect literature for this dissertation, I utilized online databases and traditional library searchers to gather current research on the topic of focus. These included, ERIC (EBSCO), ProQuest, Google and Google Scholar and the Seton Hall University Library. The conceptual framework for this study guided the literature search.

The focus on perceptions and motivations were key components of this literature search. The following keywords were entered in multiple combinations to locate literature pertaining to the topic of focus: *assistant principal, principal, reluctant, perception, motivation, aspirations, principal shortage, career aspirations, aspirations, future leaders, influence, mobility, leaders, school, principal candidates, advancing, variables, recruiting, building principals, career satisfaction, and job satisfaction.*

During the literature review, I discovered there was limited research on assistant principals' perceptions of the role of the principal and assistant principal career aspirations for advancement. In order to provide a synthesis of the current literature relating to this dissertation topic, I grouped the literature into four categories (Role of Assistant Principal, Role of Principal, Principal Shortage, and Reluctant Principal Candidates).

### **Limitations of the Review**

There have been substantial studies conducted in the past on the shortage of school principals. Research has begun to focus on teacher leaders' and assistant principals' desires to become a principal. Because of this focus, I may have missed literature written during the time this dissertation was written. The focus of this dissertation is on the perceptions assistant principals hold and how these perceptions effect their motivation for career advancement. I attempted to provide literature that captures the essence of the topic of focus.

## **Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Literature**

In order to prepare a review of literature for this research study, I included the following types of literature:

- commentary from peer reviewed journal articles,
- dissertations,
- government reports,
- peer reviewed studies from journal articles,
- scholarly research studies,
- text focused on educational leadership, and
- text focused on the conceptual framework for this research study.

The literature excluded from this dissertation includes:

- literature focused outside the scope of this research study,
- literature that is not written in English, and
- polemical articles or text.

## **Examination of Current Literature**

### **Role of Assistant Principal**

The role of an assistant principal is critical, but in reviewing related literature there is a lack of information regarding the assistant principal. “While a great deal has been written about principals...comparatively little has been written about the assistant principal” (Mertz & McNeely, 1999, p. 21). In a review of the assistant principal, Glanz (1994) reported that the first study of the assistant principal was conducted in 1970 and not much has developed since. The assistant principal has been categorized as the neglected actor and forgotten leader (Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Hartzell,



1993). The assistant principalship is frequently viewed as a springboard to the principalship (Marshall, 1992; Schmidt, Kosmoski, & Pollack, 1998). This is based on the fact that the position is a sound opportunity to gain the training needed for the principalship (Wells, Scollay, & Rinehart, 1999). “Although by all accounts there exists little in the way of substantial information regarding the assistant principal, the literature suggests that the position first appeared early in the 20th century” (Tripken, 2006).

Assistant principals are vital resources available to support principals in a host of ways. This support becomes more necessary as principals are inundated with additional duties and responsibilities associated with instructional leadership and reform efforts (Oliver, 2005). The position of the assistant principal is the most common entry-level position for administrative careers (Marshall, 2006). Due to the negative perceptions and added responsibilities of the principalship there is an abundant amount of literature regarding concerns for recruitment (Bass, 2006; Lacey, 2003; Macbeath, 2006; Papa & Baxter, 2005; Whitaker, 2001).

Marshall, Mitchell, and Gross (1990) developed a career typology based on “research that examined what took place in assistant principals’ socialization. The typology assumed that the assistant principalship is a testing and opportunity position for both the candidate and the organization. The opportunities an assistant principal obtains on the job builds skills essential to perform the role of principal. The duties of a principal require much more than simple managerial skills. To ensure that our future schools are successful, we need to recruit candidates who have had the opportunity to hone their skills as assistant principals prior to taking on the added responsibilities of the principalship.

## **Role of Principal**

The current environment of education is turbulent and highly scrutinized. High standards and accountability are the national focus. To monitor and implement these reforms, strong educational leaders are needed. It is believed that a strong leader is the cornerstone of a good school and without this leadership efforts to raise student achievement cannot be accomplished. Yet, there is a concern that the principal's role may be growing beyond what one is capable of accomplishing (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

To be an effective principal in the twenty-first century one has to understand how the role has evolved into much more than simply a building manager. "Until recently, principals' jobs were quite clearly, albeit narrowly, defined. Essentially, principals served as building managers and student disciplinarians. Currently, principals are expected to do that and much more" (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, p. 44). Principals still need to perform the needed managerial tasks on top of the expanded and added responsibilities. Principals are concerned with supervising instruction, curriculum, assessment, and providing support and staff development, enforcing policies, laws and mandates, disciplining students, creating a positive school climate, dealing with difficult parents, special education, implementing and monitoring programs, managing day-to-day operation, upholding effective communication lines; all this is expected while ensuring high standards. Now, a principals' career is under a microscope due to the highly scrutinized accountability measures being put into place in most states.

The push for greater accountability, higher standards, and advances in technology make the principal's role even more turbulent. The Institute for Educational

Leadership (2000) identified the roles that will be required of the twenty first century principal. They define the role in terms of

- **Instructional leadership** that focuses on strengthening teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decisions and accountability.
- **Community leadership** manifested in a big-picture awareness of the school's role in society; shared leadership among educators, community partners and residents; close relations with parents and others; and advocacy for school capacity building and resources; and
- **Visionary leadership** that demonstrates energy, commitment, entrepreneurial spirit, values and conviction that all children will learn at high levels, as well as inspiring others with this vision both inside and outside the school building.
- All three are important. But in a crucial sense, **leadership for student learning** is the priority that connects and encompasses all three major roles. The bottom line of schooling, after all, is student learning. Everything principals do, establishing a vision, building support systems for students, guiding instruction and so on – must be in service of student learning. (p.4)

Rallis and Goldring (2000) identified the following roles principals have as school leaders: Facilitator, Balancer, Flag Bearer and Bridger, Inquirer, Learner, and Leader. In Table1 the roles and descriptions are provided.

Table 1

*Description of Principal Roles as School Leaders*

Six Principal Roles

Roles	Description
Facilitator	The enabler of internal leadership. As a facilitator, the principal is responsible for enabling teachers to act and legitimizing the decisions teachers make in response to the demands for improving the school.
Balancer	The translator within the system. The principal is responsible for building relationships with the hierarchy, the central office, which makes the decisions to support or not to support the ideas brought forth by the principal.
Flag Bearer and Bridger	The principal is responsible for communicating to the community as well as building a bridge for communication between the community and the school.
Inquirer	The principal is responsible for asking questions about their school's activities as well as examining the decisions she/he makes.
Learner	The principal is responsible for modeling reflective behavior.
Leader	The principal must have the ability to lead others.

Note: From *Principals of Dynamic Schools* by Rallis, S. & Goldring, E. (2003), Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Newton, Giesen, Freeman, Bishop, and Zeitoun (2003) conducted a study of the perceptions and responsibilities of the principalship. They found that principals' responsibilities are categorized in two roles, "instructional leader" and "school manager." As an instructional leader, the role involves "monitoring instruction, guiding teachers, and planning professional development" (p. 508). As a school manager, the role involves "planning, coordination, control, and operation of the school" (p. 507). The members of the Institute for Educational Leadership's Task Force on the Principalship (2000) emphasized the priority of a principal must first be based on

leadership for learning. They argue that the current responsibilities of the position fail to meet this fundamental priority. In other words, the managerial requirements of the position impede on the instructional leadership requirements of the position, which have a direct impact on student learning.

Since the National Commission on Excellence in Education released “A Nation at Risk” (1983), the push for excellence has increased the demands of the principalship. Now, more than 30 years later, “one can argue that we have reached the point where aggregate expectations for the principalship are so exorbitant that they exceed the limits of what might reasonably be expected from one person” (Copland, 2001, 529). The expectations of current reforms have mushroomed. The No Child Left Behind Act and the push for evaluating administrators based on student achievement further add to the perception that the expectations of the principalship are unattainable.

School principals’ are now responsible for managerial tasks, a deep engagement in instruction and assessment, and an understanding of society issues (Whitaker, 2002). School principals must now be concerned with building professional communities that focus on instruction and achievement for all students (Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, et al., 2002). Current principals now must possess far greater leadership capacities than in the past. The work of a principal can be described as complex and overwhelming (Cooley & Shen, 2003).

In review of the literature, it is evident that there are concerns of the immense job requirements of the principalship and how some educational leaders are not interested in pursuing a career as a principal. With the expanded responsibilities of the principal, there may be a growing number of potential applicants who are not interested in pursuing a

career as a principal. The requirements, long hours, lack of financial incentives, stress, high pressure, lack of control of reforms, budget, and personnel issues, can all be classified as deterring factors for pursuing a principalship.

### **Principal Shortage**

The literature is inconsistent regarding the principal shortage. Some studies indicate a surplus of principal candidates, while other research indicates there are declining applicants (Bowles, 1990; Davis, 2005; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1998). According to Gajda and Militello (2008), educators are being certified more than enough to fill principal vacancies but they are not applying for positions. Their article, “Recruiting and Retaining School Principals: What We Can Learn From Practicing Administrators” provides data from the Massachusetts Department of Education.

3,500 people in the state held school administrator licenses as of October 2003.

That same year 914 new individuals received an initial Massachusetts administrator licenses, resulting in a total pool of licensed principals of 4,414. The total number of state principalship and assistant principal positions requiring licensure (1,735 and 642 respectively) puts the total number of administrator positions requiring licensed applicants at 2,377. (para. 7)

These results are mainly due to factors such as stress and inadequate compensation compared to the high demands of the job. Factors such as these are considered to be deterrents, making the position less attractive to potential applicants (Gajda & Militello, 2008; Hancock & Bird, 2008; McAdams, 1998).

The issue of salary appears throughout the literature as a contributing factor to the shortage of principal candidates. Cushing, Kerrins, and Johnstone (2003) explained the perception of inadequate salary compensation for the principalship. They state, “If salaries are calculated on an hourly or even daily basis, the discrepancy between teacher and principal salaries appears even greater—considering principals typically work longer school days, longer school weeks and longer school years” (p. 29).

In the article, “Where are the Principal Candidates? Perceptions of Superintendents,” Whitaker reported on a 1999 University of Minnesota study. Eighty-six percent of Minnesota superintendents reported that filling principal positions was *difficult* or *very difficult* (Sheldon & Munnich, 2011). To further gather data, Whitaker conducted interviews with superintendents concerning the quantity and quality of principal candidates. Ninety percent noted a *moderate* or *extreme* shortage of applicants for principalship positions. The superintendents commented that there is a “lack of prior experience candidates possess, which lead to a perception of lower quality than in previous years” (p. 3) The superintendents offered factors such as the “position’s time commitment, high-stakes testing, school report cards, increased violence, a lack of public respect for education, and overall job pressure” as reasons for the principal shortage (Whitaker, 2001, p.5).

DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) examined principal concerns and perceptions of the growing shortage in the principalship. They found that principals are being taken off their most satisfying duties and spending more time performing duties that are less satisfying to them. Principals identified lacking both time and the personnel to perform expectations of an instructional leader (66%). It was reported they did not

receive enough administrative support (47%). A high percentage reported working 50-hours per week (84%), while 46% said salary increases lagged behind those of teachers. The principals identified “special education laws and implementation” (90%), “legal issues” (88%), and “non-academic student behavior” (discipline, drugs...) (85%), as significant and highly significant problems or issues in organizational management. The responses to why people are not pursuing a career as a principal included, “stress of the job” (91%), “long hours” (86%), “inadequate salary” (67%), “broadened accountability” (64%), and “disrespect from students” (54%).

Between 1997 and 2005, surveys were conducted in Maine to examine the stability of school leadership. One quarter of the surveyed principals reported if they had the chance to go back and do it all over again, they would not choose the same career.

Other findings of this research included,

- Between 25 and 30% of Maine principals consistently express dissatisfaction with or uncertainty about their choice of careers over the eight-year period.
- Many of these same principals also find the work stressful and characterized by conflict and criticism. They feel “overloaded” with work, find that it “intrudes” too much on personal/family time, and about half declared that “the job is wearing me out.”
- They also reported that “changing priorities” and disagreement within the community make their work environment unpredictable and demanding.

(Buckingham, Donaldson, & Marnik, 2005, p. 3)



The principals also indicated that the workload was too stressful. The participants from the 2005 survey reported, “my job is stressful” (85%), “because of the long hours, I have little time left for myself” (69%), “my workload makes it difficult to give my best attention to tasks” (62%), “my job intrudes too much on my personal life” (56%), “the demands of this job are wearing me out” (51%), and “often wonder if the long hours involved in the job are worth it” (47%). These statistics are alarming. If the role of principal is viewed as impossible, many highly qualified administrative candidates could be reluctant to pursue a principalship. There may not be a shortage of candidates who are certified, but the quality of the applicants willing to apply may be shrinking.

MacBeath (2006) labeled the issue of attracting quality candidates as the “war for talent.” He summarized eight factors that erode talent, energy, and creativity, which lead to burnout and reluctance to pursue a principalship. These factors are, stress (changing nature of the job, the burden of success or failure of school, test scores, lack of control), workload (administrative tasks, extra responsibilities), accountability and bureaucracy (paperwork, feeling of not being in control, blame and shame), personal and domestic concerns (lifestyle, incentives and disincentives of the job), salary (lower pay per hour than teaching staff), social factors (needs, attitudes, motivations of students), and teacher supply line (teacher recruitment). These all contribute to an intensification of the role of principal. This intensification principals’ face could further lead to assistant principals’ developing negative perceptions of the principalship.

### **Reluctant Principal Candidates**

Throughout the literature, the push for accountability and the lack of compensation have been identified as factors that influence potential candidates. In

2000, 90 principals at a Principals Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. identified reasons why fewer individuals seek to become principals. These included, “the changing demands of the job; salary; time; lack of parent and community support and the media and public toward schools; and lack of respect” (Kennedy, 2000). As described earlier, the research DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) found that principals identified increased pressure and accountability, long hours, inadequate compensation, changing roles, insufficient resources and support as common conditions of employment.

Pounder and Merrill (2001) reported the findings of a study that examined assistant principals’ perceptions of the principalship. The participants reported that “balancing the demands of job, and family; terminating unfit employees; job stress; pressure from interest groups; the extended work day required; extracurricular supervision; and teacher grievances and union complaints” (para. 10) had an impact on their decision to pursue a career in the principalship.

Richard (2000), provides a description of the roles and responsibilities of principals today,

Today’s principal is faced with the complex task of creating a schoolwide vision, being an instructional leader, planning for effective professional development, guiding teachers, handling discipline, attending events, coordinating buses, tending to external priorities such as legislative mandates, and all the other minute details that come with supervising a school. (as cited in Hertling, 2001)

The traditional belief that the assistant principal position is a stepping-stone may be changing. In the article “Toughest Job in Education?” the author, Alan Richard (2000) provided several assistant principals’ attitudes toward their job and career

aspirations. As a result of the increasing demands of the position, these assistant principals indicated they would not want to apply for a role as principal. These assistant principals have spent many years acquiring the skills to be effective instructional leaders. The position of assistant principal provides many opportunities to learn the needed skills to become a highly qualified principal. If assistant principals are unwilling to pursue the next step, the pool of qualified applicants will continue to shrink.

Kathy Lacey (2003) conducted a study of the factors that impact leadership aspirations, which uncovered a finding, not identified in any other research. Principals in her study acknowledged that sources of dissatisfaction were visible to staff members and sources of satisfaction were not visible or known by most staff. The principals acknowledged they shared sources of stress and dissatisfaction more than the positives associated with their role as principal. The results of these negative perceptions further fuel the negative view of the principalship, decreasing the aspirations of potential principal candidates. Teachers were surveyed to assess their aspirations of seeking an administrative position. The results of these surveys indicated that the role of principal was unappealing, but the role of assistant principal was appealing because of the perception that assistant principals had more job satisfaction than the principal.

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Merriam (2009), a researcher conducting a qualitative research study is focused on “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their words, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall is to *understand* how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). In order to conduct this research, I used the phenomenological approach as a lens to analyze the

primary research question: To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the principal impact assistant principals' perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations? "The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation" (Lester, 1999, p. 1).

"Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals" (Lester, 1999, p. 3). Perceptions one holds are internalized and become their reality, which influences their behavior. This is why a study on the perceptions assistant principals' hold toward the role of principal is important. The use of the phenomenology approach "does not dictate to phenomena but rather it wants to understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and the elucidation of this process is a descriptive task" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 6). Describing the perceptions assistant principals hold can provide a valid indicator of beliefs (motivations and aspirations) in regards to the job of principalship.

Merleau-Ponty (2005) stated, "the world is what we perceive" (xviii). It is these perceptions that are sought to describe how assistant principals perceive the role of the principal. "To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth" (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. xviii). The perceptions one holds are continuously developed and transform through the experiences one has in life. "The world is not what I think, but what I live through" (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. xviii). Based on assistant principals' experiences and exchanges with principals' perceptions are developed. It was the goal of this study to provide rich data. "Because the world of human experience is ambiguous, frames of reference shape how situations

are defined and determine what actions take place...learning from experience often plays a more powerful role than formal education” (Gaziel. 2003, p. 477).

Theories of motivation are also an important lens for this study. If an individual is motivated to advance to a higher level, their perceptions can motivate them to take different career paths. In the pursuit of studying perception, Clayton Alderfer’s (1969) existence, relatedness, growth (ERG) theory, which is based on Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, was also used as a lens for this study. Alderfer’s ERG classifies needs into three groups (existence, relatedness, and growth) and suggests that people pursue individual or multiple needs simultaneously and when a higher need is not met (growth), they focus on lower needs (relatedness and existence).

David McClelland’s Theory of Needs (1961) was also used as a lens for this study. McClelland’s theory proposes that needs are acquired as a result of experiences an individual has over time. He defined three groups of needs, (achievement, affiliation, and power) which impact a person’s motivation and job effectiveness. Assistant principals develop perceptions of the principalship as they interact and observe principals. These perceptions can impact their motivations and aspirations for career advancement.

### **Other Dissertations**

Carole-Ann Sheils Dunleavy conducted a study in 2011. Her study focused on the mobility of assistant principals. The author’s two essential questions were, “Do Assistant Principals seek the Principalship, or does their comfort level or fear of risk-taking urge them to remain Assistant Principals, or perhaps, go back to the classroom as teachers?” and “Do Assistant Principals see themselves in a terminal career, or do they

aspire to the Principalship or other Administrative positions?” (pp. 1-2). Dunleavy used a quantitative approach to ascertain data to answer her research questions through the use of the School Administrators Association of NY State to survey 300 assistant principals in New York State with a return rate of 137.

The findings of Dunleavy’s research indicated that assistant principals under the age 50 had a stronger desire to pursue a principalship. She also found that assistant principals in schools with a population less than 650 had a stronger desire to become principal. Dunleavy concluded her dissertation with the remark; “Assistant principals are a group of leaders who value their work, many of whom take on responsibilities formerly reserved to the principalship, and work with them to meet the challenges schools face now” (p. 105).

Dunleavy’s findings contradict a 2011 study done by Singletary-Dixon. Singletary-Dixon also utilized a quantitative research method to obtain data of New York City assistant principals. Singletary-Dixon concluded that 69% of assistant principals were satisfied with their career and they did not intend on pursuing a principalship. Singletary-Dixon’s study examined assistant principals’ perceptions of their relationship with the principal and the school community and preparedness for the principalship. She utilized a Likert scale to survey 400 New York City public school assistant principals with a return rate of 246. The findings of this study indicate that “while content with their relationships held within the school community and their roles, they do not, for the most part, aspire to be a principal” (p. 70).

One implication of the data in this study is that 69% of the assistant principals who served in the position for 1 to 10 years were highly satisfied in their

positions. However, other findings indicated that neither the 1- to 10-year cohort of assistant principals or the 11+ cohort of assistant principals has any aspiration to move into the principalship. (p. 69)

One of the recommendations for practice identified in this study was for further investigations as to why assistant principals refrain from moving into the principalship. Singletary-Dixon indicated a need for “an in-depth focus on the specific areas that are causing the assistant principals’ reluctance” (p. 70). This was also recommended in Dunleavy’s 2011 study, which indicated a limitation in her study, came from the fact that it does not “provide the detailed, personal responses available when conducting qualitative research” (p. 60). The use of quantitative research does not provide an in-depth analysis needed to gain insight of perceptions. In order to collect this data, I utilized a qualitative approach to provide elaboration on the topic of assistant principals’ perceptions and career aspirations.

Necia Emerson Marchett conducted a quantitative study in 2004 to ascertain information on the factors that influence New York State high school assistant principals intentions to apply for high school principalship. He surveyed 162 New York State high school assistant principals. Like Dunleavy, he found that assistant principals did aspire to become principal. He found that 63.1% intended to apply for a high school principal position, and 51.1% intended to apply within 5 years. Thirty six and nine-tenths percent of respondents indicated they were not interested in applying for a high school position. The reasons for not pursuing a principalship included: intention to retire, time demands, politics, contentment with current position, responsibilities of the principalship, pursuing another administrative position, salary/compensation, and lack of autonomy.

The deterring factor of time is also evident in a study conducted by Joel Harris in 2011. Harris conducted a quantitative study focused on the factors that influence West Virginia educator's decision to pursue the principalship. He surveyed 600 randomly selected educators who were not currently working in an administrative position with a return rate of 379. His first research question focused on, "What are the motivating factors that influence the pursuit of employment in principal positions by West Virginia professional educators that hold the appropriate administration licensure?" (p. 10). The findings indicated that the "Most important motivating factor toward pursuing the principalship was for *Personal Professional Challenges* (M=3.60) of the job, closely followed by the *Desire to be a Leader* (M=3.54)" (p. 57). The second research question Harris pursued was, "What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for principal positions?" (p. 10).

The highest reported factor to this research question was related to the job being *highly stressful* (M=3.42). The second highest reported factor was the *Large Time Commitment* (M=3.36), closely followed by *Accountability for Student Achievement* (M=3.29). *The amount of Paperwork* (M=3.24) was fourth and *insufficient compensation* (M=3.09) was fifth highest reported deterrent. *Too much responsibility* (M=3.04) was rated sixth, *Social problems* (M=2.96) was seventh and *negatively affects family life* was rated eight with a mean of 2.88. (p. 59)

To summarize the findings of Harris's (2011) study, high stress, large time commitment, accountability for achievement, paperwork, insufficient compensation, and too much responsibility were the main deterrents to pursuing the principalship.



The number one factor that participants chose for not becoming a school administrator was high stress. The second and third most reported deterrents were time commitment and accountability. All of the top three could be viewed as interrelated. It can be concluded that educators view the principalship as extremely stressful with unrealistic time and accountability expectations. (p. 67)

Harris also provided a recommendation for a qualitative study to be done to determine if the data obtained is consistent with his quantitative study.

As described earlier, Kathy Lacey (2003) found that sources of stress are commonly visible and sources of satisfaction were not. Harris also found that the number one deterring factor was stress. Looking more in-depth at how principals perceive their role, Stephen Knobl conducted a study in 2010 on the perceptions of high school principals regarding their perceived roles, professional development, and their challenges and frustrations. Knobl utilized a qualitative research method to obtain in-depth information from eight current high school principals working in Florida. The findings of this study indicated that the greatest challenges reported by the principals were, “management of time, balancing leadership and management of the school, and navigating the legislative mandates and accountability requirements” (p. 82). When asked to identify the greatest frustrations of being a principal, the participants reported, “issues related to time and legislative mandates dictated to them by the local, state, and federal systems. They faced constant pressures that could be directly tied to student achievement and accountability measures” (p. 82). One participant in Knobl’s study expressed his frustrations of being a principal by stating,

There's more emotional frustration...because the buck stops with you....Student achievement stops with you...in the age of accountability, it's a very demanding position, it's very complex, and it's very political....The number one priority is increasing the graduation rate...closing the achievement gap, which is a nationwide issue. (p. 56)

Another participant said,

I didn't realize how much you lose your life until I became a high school principal...not...the healthiest lifestyle in the world. If you truly are in it to see your school improve and your kids learning...it's a 15 or 16-hr a day job. We're moving away from principal as a manager and more towards the principal as the instructional leader. It truly consumes you. (p. 58)

Assistant principals observe these frustrations. This is why it is important to conduct a qualitative research study that focuses on the perceptions assistant principals hold toward the principalship to determine if these perceptions impact their career aspirations. It was my goal to conduct an in-depth qualitative research study to focus on assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship as it related to their career aspirations.

In 2007, John Taylor conducted a study focused on job satisfaction of high school assistant principals in Florida. He utilized a mixed methodology approach to collect data. 128 participants were surveyed using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (authors, year), Individual Demographic Questionnaire, and responded to telephone interview questionnaires. He found that the greatest dissatisfaction was

compensation (52%). Through telephone interviews, John Taylor gathered data that suggested the participants lacked the desire to pursue a high school principalship. He also found,

The correlation ( $r=.35$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) between age and principalship (no-interest) indicated that as high school assistant principals got older they lost interest in becoming high school principals. As administrators spend time in their role as assistant principals they need to be mentored, trained, and encouraged to pursue their personal development of becoming a principal as soon as they are able. If assistant principals are not persuaded to move into a principalship as soon as they are ready, their interest in that pursuit may quickly wane. (p. viii-ix)

### **Summary**

With the current perceptions of the principalship, there is a concern that educational leaders are looking to roles other than that of a building principal as a career path. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) feel that the “principalship is at a crossroads” (p. 48) due to the “graying” of school administrators combined with increased job responsibilities, legislation, reforms, raising standards and accountability, leading to vacancies nationwide. Literature also highlighted the perception of inadequate salary compensation as a deterring factor for qualified candidates to pursue a principalship. These demands result in a perception that the job is impossible, limiting the pursuit of the position. Chapter III will provide a detailed description of the research design, participants and sampling method, instrumentation, setting of focus group session, data collection methods and data analysis methods.

### **Chapter III**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship and their aspirations for career advancement. Specifically, I sought to answer the following research question, To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the principal impact assistant principals' perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations? In review of current research the need for an in-depth qualitative study to provide a focus on specific areas that are causing assistant principals' reluctance to aspire to a principalship was apparent. This study applied qualitative research methods utilizing one focus group session and in-depth interviews of assistant principals to bring light to the perceptions current assistant principals hold towards the principalship. The study of perceptions can provide valuable descriptions of what motivates and influences behavior of assistant principals.

The authors, Mary Debus and Porter Novelli (2008) of the *“Methodological Review: A Handbook for Excellence in Focus Groups”* wrote, “The primary conceptual reason for using qualitative research is that it provides depth of responses and, therefore, greater consequent understanding than can be acquired through quantitative techniques” (p. 2).

One of the recommendations for practice identified in Shaniquia Lawaun Singletary-Dixon's (2011) study was for an investigation as to why assistant principals refrain from moving into the principalship. The authors indicated a need for “An in-depth focus on the specific areas that are causing the assistant principals' reluctance” (p.

70). The use of quantitative research does not provide an in-depth analysis needed to gain insight on perceptions. To collect the data needed for this research study, I utilized a qualitative approach to provide elaboration on the topic of perceptions.

This chapter begins with a description of my professional background. Next, a detailed description of the research design is included. Following this, the sampling method utilized for selection of participants and descriptors of the assistant principals who participated in this research study is included followed by the setting of data collection. Then, the data collection methods and analysis techniques are described and the validity and reliability of the study is discussed. Finally, the limitations that are characteristic to qualitative research methods and the delimitations I placed on this study are explained.

### **Background**

At the time of writing this research study, I began my third year as an assistant principal of a preK through fifth grade school in New Jersey. Prior to becoming an assistant principal, I was a coordinator of community programs for a school district, while I taught first grade. Prior to taking on the community programs coordinator position, I taught first grade, third grade, and was a teacher's assistant in fifth grade, second grade, and worked in an alternative education program for students classified as Emotionally Disturbed.

### **Design**

For this qualitative research study, I used the focus group and in-depth interview methods to ascertain in-depth information to describe assistant principals' perceptions of the role of the principalship and their motivations and career aspirations. This study is

based on obtaining and describing perceptions; the focus group and in-depth interview methods were utilized since these methods have “the intent to promote self-disclosure among participants” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). The focus is on obtaining what individuals with knowledge of a topic really think and feel. The use of semi-structured interview questions was used to ensure the focus group and in-depth interviews obtained full disclosure of the perceptions the participants held. This interview format permitted greater flexibility allowing the participants to expand their responses, and provides greater exploration by the researcher. It is an open-ended investigation technique.

The design of the interview questions was linked to the conceptual framework of this research study (perception and motivation). “To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. xviii). The motivation theories of Alderfer (1969) and McClelland (1961) were also used in creating the research question. Alderfer’s theory ERG classifies needs into three groups, (existence, relatedness, growth) and suggest that when a higher need is not met (growth), they focus on lower needs (relatedness and existence). McClelland’s Theory of Needs proposes that needs are acquired as a result of experiences an individual has over time.

The research questions for this study focused on the perspectives assistant principals held toward the job requirements of the principal and the factors that influence and motivate assistant principals’ career aspirations. See Appendix A for the interview script and questions.

## **Sampling**

I contacted Dr. Gerry Schaller, the New Jersey Leaders To Leaders Program Coordinator via phone to explain the purpose of the research study, the design, and to obtain permission to use Leaders To Leaders residents as participants for this research study. Following this conversation, I sent a letter via U.S. Mail to request approval to utilize Leaders To Leaders residents as participants in this study. Next, the Leaders To Leaders coordinator and I meet to discuss the random selection of participants, arrangement of focus group and in-depth interviews. Following this, the Leaders To Leaders coordinator signed an approval letter to conduct this study.

After gaining approval from Dr. Gerry Schaller, I submitted an application for approval to the Seton Hall University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving approval from IRB, I utilized the purposeful sampling technique to select potential participants for this research study. The goal was to structure a study to provide rich data to describe assistant principals' perceptions. The use of purposeful sampling "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). In selecting the participants for this study, the intent was to use the technique of maximum variation. Merriam describes maximum variation as a purposeful sampling technique that involves "identifying and seeking out those who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics of interest for the study" (2009, p 79). Due to the limited variance of participants from the different DFGs in New Jersey, this study did not provide a maximum variation of assistant principals.

Originally, the population for this study consisted of current assistant principals working in New Jersey who were enrolled in their second year of the Leaders To Leaders program. Due to a limited number of participant responses, I included assistant principals who had just completed the Leaders To Leaders program requirements. I chose to use the New Jersey Leaders To Leaders program because these individuals fulfill the characteristics needed of the research participants for this study. This ensured that the assistant principals had at least one and a half years working in their role with a principal. This study was designed to ascertain the perceptions assistant principals held of the principalship.

School districts in New Jersey are classified by their district factor grouping (DFG) based on the socioeconomic status (SES) of the citizens in each school district. There are eight DFGs (A, B, CD, DE, FG, GH, I J) in New Jersey. DFG A has the lowest SES compared to J, which has the highest SES in New Jersey. During the time of this research study there were 590 school districts in New Jersey. Originally, I grouped the DFGs into three categories, Low (A, B, CD), Middle (DE, FG) and High (GH, I, J) and was interested in randomly sampling assistant principals in their second year of the Leaders To Leaders program based on DFG to participate in one, 1-hour focus group session. Due to a lack of participant variance, I was not able to accomplish this initial plan. Table 2 provides the total number of districts in each of the eight DFGs at the time of this research.



Table 2

*New Jersey Number of Districts per DFG*

Data provided by Department of Education Website 7/4/12  
[www.state.nj.us.education/schools/achievement/dfg.htm](http://www.state.nj.us.education/schools/achievement/dfg.htm)

DFG	# Of Districts
A	35
B	78
CD	75
DE	100
FG	87
GH	78
I	105
J	15

\*Includes all New Jersey's public school districts (regardless of school configuration or grade levels served).

I sent a total of 433 Letters of Solicitation to assistant principals in their second year of the New Jersey Leaders To Leaders program or who had just completed the program requirements with a response rate of 22. Five of the potential participants who responded did not fit the profile of being an assistant principal because they obtained a principalship. Four of the potential participants who did respond failed to respond to an email scheduling an interview. One potential participant said she did not have the time to participate. The total number of participants for this research study was 12 (2.8% of the solicited participants).

### **Profile of the Participants**

Due to the limited number of potential participant responses and scheduling conflicts, I was only able to successfully conduct one focus group session and nine in-depth phone interviews. To ensure all participants in this study remained anonymous, I did not include any personal information in this study. Each participant was coded

during the time of transcription. The participant demographics are outlined in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3

*Focus Group A Consisted of Assistant Principals in their Second Year of L2L*

Assistant Principal	DFG	School Level	Gender
A1	J	Elementary School	Female
A2	J	Elementary School	Female
A3	J	Middle School	Female

Table 4

*Interviews with Assistant Principal in their Second Year of L2L*

Assistant Principal	DFG	School Level	Gender
B1	CD	Middle School	Female
B2	I	Elementary School	Female
B3	GH	High School	Male
B4	I	High School	Female
B5	I	Middle School	

Table 5

*Interviews with Assistant Principals who Just Completed L2L*

Assistant Principal	DFG	School Level	Gender
C1	GH	Middle School	Female
C2	I	Middle School	Male
C3	J	High School	Male
C4	J	High School	Male

There were a total of seven female participants and five male participants. Four participants worked in a high school, five worked in a middle school and three worked in an elementary school. There were a total of five participants who worked as assistant principals in DFG J. Four assistant principals worked in a school district with a DFG I, two assistant principals worked in a school district with a DFG GH. One assistant principal worked in a district with a DFG CD.

### **Setting**

I had permission from the coordinator of the Leaders To Leaders program to utilize a conference room at the NJPSA facility, but there were not enough willing participants to travel to that location to schedule focus group sessions. Only one focus group session consisting of three participants was held. These participants preferred to travel to the school where I work because it was closer than the NJPSA facility. Because of scheduling conflicts and in order to obtain the necessary data, phone interviews were conducted. This allowed for a greater number of participants for this research study.

### **Data Collection**

The qualitative research method design utilizing one focus group session and in-depth interviews was used to ascertain in-depth information to describe assistant principals' perceptions of the role of the principalship. To collect this data, I arranged one focus group consisting of three participants and nine in-depth phone interviews. The interview questions utilized during the focus group session and all in-depth interviews consisted of,

**Question 1:** Why did you become an administrator?

**Question 2:** What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an assistant principal?

**Question 3:** What are the most important job requirements of a principal?

**Question 4:** What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?

**Question 5:** What are the factors that motivate and inspire assistant principals to pursue employment as a Principal?

**Question 6:** What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a principalship?

**Question 7:** Are you interested in pursuing a principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a principalship?

**Follow-up Question 1:** Have we missed anything?

**Follow-up Question 2:** Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?

The focus group session and nine phone interviews were recorded. During the interview session, I took notes to highlight critical points shared during each interview. Then, I transcribed the data into a word document in order to prepare an analysis of the data. The focus group and interview script are provided in appendix A. The unabridged transcripts are provided in Appendix B.

The rationale for utilizing this method of data collection is based on the fact that qualitative research methods are designed to ascertain in-depth information. The goal of this research study was to describe assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship and their aspirations and motivations for career advancement.

### **Data Analysis**

“Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data...and interpreting what people said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). Upon transcribing the focus group interviews, I utilized the description analysis process. This consisted of a transcription based analysis where the “analysis uses unabridged transcripts of the focus groups as a basis for analysis” (Krueger & Casey 2000, p. 131). After reading the transcript, I wrote notes,

coded sections, and developed categories to link common themes. Coding is an inductive process with the purpose of breaking down the information to identify consistencies in the data. “Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 234). Following this exercise, I created a document that summarized the findings and highlighted common themes.

### **Validity and Reliability**

In order to ensure validity for this research study, following the construction of the interview questions, I had a jury of experts (three principals) from DFG J review the interview questions. After gathering suggestions from the jury of experts, I made a change in the order of the questions. To check for question reliability, I conducted a pilot focus group of assistant principals in DFG J and held two pilot in-depth interviews with assistant principals in DFG J before conducting the focus group session or interviews for this study. Ninety one and nine-tenths percent of the participating assistant principals in this study were from one of the top three DFG classifications in New Jersey. Only one participant was from the low DFG category group.

To further ensure reliability, I offered to email the transcriptions to all participants to ensure accuracy. Only one of the participants asked to have his transcript sent to him. Following this, I used a coding method to consolidate and reduce the data. “Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data...and interpreting what people said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). Coding the transcriptions allowed me to breakdown the information to identify consistencies in the data. The inductive process of data analysis

and interpretation of the transcripts raised further questions, which could be utilized for further research studies. These suggestions are provided in chapter V.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The primary goal of this study was to investigate assistant principals' perceptions of the role of the principalship to gain a deeper understanding as to the factors that affect career advancement decisions. The focus of perception was a limitation because perceptions are not always accurate. Another limitation identified was, qualitative research is related to subjectivity and highly susceptible to bias on the part of the researcher (Debus & Novelli, 2008). The size of this research study was also a limitation because it doesn't allow for the research findings to describe the perceptions of all assistant principals. The poor response rate of assistant principals created another limitation for this study. The assumption that all participants in the focus group session and in-depth interviews engaged honestly and provided truthful responses, but this cannot be confirmed. The instrumentation utilized to obtain data for this research study was not perfect, which creates another limitation for this study. The analysis procedures of transcribing the focus group session and coding the data was also another limitation due to the possibility of human error.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

I placed the delimitation of only selecting assistant principals who were residents in their second year or just completed the requirements of the Leaders To Leaders program. The selection of assistant principals for this research study was done to construct the one focus group session and hold in-depth interviews of participants with similar knowledge and experiences.

## **Summary**

Chapter III began with an explanation of the purpose of this research. Then, a description of the design of the research study and the importance of focusing on perceptions was provided. Next, I specified the interview questions that relate to the conceptual framework of this study. The purpose of sampling techniques used, and the methods for selecting the participants were described. Afterwards, the profile of the participants and the setting of the focus group session and in-depth interviews were explained. After that, the data collection methods and rationale were defined. Following this, the data analysis, the validity and reliability measures taken were outlined. Finally, the limitations and delimitations were categorized. Chapter IV will present the findings of this research study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship and their aspirations for career advancement. Specifically, I sought to answer the following research question, To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the principal impact assistant principals' perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations? The following guiding questions assisted in answering the research problem,

1. How do assistant principals perceive the role of the principal?
2. What are the factors that influence assistant principals' motivation to seek or not seek a position as a school principal?

This chapter provides the findings of the one focus group session and nine interviews. The findings are presented following the order of the interview questions. For each interview question, I provide a description of how the participants responded categorized by the themes that emerged during the coding process. First, the data analysis of this study is provided. Next, background information and a description of the assistant principal participants are provided. Following this, the data for each interview question grouped by themes that emerged is provided.

### **Data Analysis**

This study focused on the perceptions assistant principals' hold toward the principalship. Specifically, this study served as a qualitative assessment of the attitudes and perceptions of assistant principals who were in their second year of the Leaders To Leaders program or had just completed the requirements of the program. In conducting



the data analysis, I sought to make meaning out of the data. This “involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176). Through the process of inspecting and coding the transcripts, I had the goal of highlighting valuable information to find answers to the research questions. As Merriam stated, an “important characteristic of qualitative research is that the process is inductive; that is, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research” (p. 15). During the process of coding the participants’ responses, I grouped similar responses into overarching themes.

Assigning codes to pieces of data is the way you begin to construct categories.

After working through the entire transcript in this manner, you go back over your marginal notes and comments (codes) and try to group those comments and notes that seem to go together. (Merriam p. 179)

This chapter includes the study’s findings. Based on the number of assistant principals who participated in this research study, this data analysis summarizes responses of twelve assistant principals.

### **Background Information**

The type of questioning techniques used for this study consisted of an in-depth interview script that guided me through the process of collecting the needed data during the one focus group session and nine interviews. There were a total of seven questions and two follow-up questions asked of each participant. Not all participants responded to both of the follow-up questions, but all participants responded to the seven central interview questions.

## **Data Findings**

The interview questions were designed to provide insight to the following research questions,

1. How do assistant principals perceive the role of the principal?
2. What are the factors that influence assistant principals' motivation to seek or not seek a position as a school principal?

To answer the research questions, a detailed narrative of the findings for each of the seven interview questions broken down by the themes that emerged during the coding process is provided. Following this, a description of the responses to the two follow-up interview questions is offered.

### **Interview Questions**

During the process of coding the participants' responses, I grouped similar responses into themes. For each of the seven interview questions, I combined similar responses to make overarching themes. The findings of this research study are organized by the seven interview questions. Each interview question has several themes that are presented by the greatest number of responses to the least number of responses within each theme. The attributes of the theme for each research question will be explained in each research question subheading.

Table 6

*Research Question 1 Responses by Themes*

Interview Question	Theme
Question One: Why did you become an administrator?	Drive-Motivation
	Greater Impact
	Guided
	Financial Incentives
	Opportunity to be a Leader
	Curriculum & Instruction
Interview Question	Theme
Question Two: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?	Relationships with Students
	Impact on Student (Academic, Social Emotional) Career
	Instructional Leadership
	Relationships with Parents
	Managerial
	Relationships with Students
Interview Question	Theme
Question Three: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?	Instructional Leadership
	Communication
	Visionary Leadership
	Flexible Decision Maker
	Personnel Decisions
	Managerial
	Organized
Interview Question	Theme
Question Four: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?	Time
	Difficult Parents
	Managerial
	Personnel Decisions
	Communication
	Responsibility
	Instructional Leader
	Politics
	Discipline

Interview Question	Theme
Question Five: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?	Next Step
	Positive Experience as Assistant Principal
	Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference
	Gaining Confidence
	Financial Incentives
Interview Question	Theme
Question Six: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?	Time
	Lack of Confidence
	Responsibility
	Content Being Assistant Principal
	Difficult Parents
	Further Removed From Students
Interview Question	Theme
Question Seven: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?	Growing as an Administrator
	Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference
	Gaining Confidence
	Content Being Assistant Principal
	Less Curriculum & Instruction

A deeper breakdown of participant responses grouped by themes for each of the seven interview questions is provided.

Table 7

*Interview Question 1 Themes*

Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?		
Theme	Number of participants with a response which fits criteria	Assistant Principal Codes who responded
Drive-Motivation	8	A1, A3, B3, B4, B5, C1, C2, C4,
Greater Impact	7	A2, B1, B2, B3, B5, C1, C4,
Guided	6	A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, C3,
Financial Incentives	2	B5, C3
Opportunity to be a Leader	1	B3
Curriculum & Instruction	1	C1

The first question asked was, Why did you become an administrator? This first question provided six coded themes. The themes that encompassed the responses for this interview question included, Drive-Motivation, Greater Impact, Guided, Financial Incentives, Opportunity to be a Leader, and Curriculum and Instruction. Each of the themes is described.

**Theme: Drive-Motivation**

The greatest number of coded responses fell into the theme, Drive-Motivation (eight). Drive-Motivation was the coded theme for responses categorized by assistant principals who stated that as teachers they had internal motivation or drive to pursue an administrative position.

Some of the responses indicated that administration was the “Next logical step” for the participants, or they wanted something “more challenging” (A1). One participant said, “there was something internal and intrinsic that made me want to do it” (C2). Several participants stated they enjoyed being a classroom teacher, but expressed the motivation to move up the career ladder because they wanted something more (B3, B4, B5). One participant said, “At the time in my teaching career, I felt myself going through

the motions” (B5). Another participant responded, “I got my masters degree and through that program started to look more closely at administration around me and realized, hey this is something that I can do. Something I would be interested in” (C4).

### **Theme: Greater Impact**

The second highest coded theme had seven responses that fit into the theme Greater Impact. Greater impact was coded for participants speaking about taking on more responsibility and impacting the school community as a whole.

Four assistant principals spoke directly about working with a larger number of students and having a greater impact on the school population and instruction. Participant A2 said, “I have always felt the importance of professional development in the world of education and this gives me another avenue to move forward with that goal.” Similar to A1, participant B1 spoke about having the ability to make changes and lead instruction. This participant responded, “I think you can have an impact on what’s going on at the school and on a district level”.

Several of the participants indicated that moving into administration came from the desire to have a greater impact on more children (B2, B3, B5, C1, C4). “I was thinking that there were some pretty good things that I was doing in my classroom and I thought I could implement them school wide level” (B2). Another responded,

As opposed to the 150 kids I might have had in classes you know, now, I am in charge of 1,500 kids. So it has actually given me the opportunity to get to know more people, and I always felt like I had something to offer for the students as far as the experiences I have had (B3).

Similar to the responses B2 and B3 provided, participant B5 stated, “I thought that I could take some of my assists from teaching and coaching experiences and attempt to lead a building or be a co-leader of a building, instead of managing a small group of students or athletes.” C1 also spoke about the desire to impact a greater number of children. “I wouldn’t just be impacting the students that I would be instructing in a classroom. I would be impacting district level students on a more global scale.” Related to B2, B3, B5, and C1, participant C4 shared the desire to move into administration came from the ability to “work more closely with individual students. So rather than working with, you know 25 kids in a class, you know, five periods a day, it allowed me to work more closely with specific students.”

#### **Theme: Guided**

Five responses were classified in the Guided theme. This theme is categorized by responses indicating that the current assistant principals were led as teachers into pursuing an administrative career. The experiences these participants described demonstrated they were encouraged to work in a leadership role as a teacher (A2) or they were encouraged to apply for an assistant principalship (B2, C2). One of the participants said, “I was kind of selected by administration to start doing things around the building. I was asked to apply for a department head position, which was really kind of nice” (C3). Participant B1 shared she was part of a group of teachers who were selected by the school district and were sent for their masters degrees in Administration.

#### **Theme: Financial Incentives**

Two of the participating assistant principals responded that pursuing an administrative position was partly due to receiving greater salary. Increased finances to

provide for his family was partly the reason B5 decided to pursue an assistant principalship. “I always wanted to move up the chain and move up the ladder and make more money to provide for my family.” One participant also shared the increase in salary for obtaining a masters degree was what first led him toward administration (C3).

**Theme: Opportunity to be a Leader**

One of the participating assistant principals indicated that the opportunity of being a leader was the reason for pursuing an assistant principalship. He said, “Getting into administration would give me an opportunity to be a leader” (B3).

**Theme: Curriculum and Instruction**

The last theme for the first interview question was Curriculum and Instruction. One of the participating assistant principals responded that she was interested in pursuing greater responsibility in curriculum and instruction outside of the classroom. C1 stated, “My goal in administration is to go into curriculum and instruction at some point. So I started out being a department chair of mathematics at a high school level and then moved up into the assistant principalship and my thought was in curriculum and instruction.”



Table 8

*Interview Question 2 Themes*

Question Two: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?		
Theme	Number of participants with response which fits criteria	Assistant Principal Codes who responded
Relationships with Students	9	A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, C3
Impact on Student (Academic, Social Emotional) Career	8	B1, B3, B4, B5, C1, C2, C3, C4
Instructional Leadership	6	A1, A2, A3, B2, B5, C2
Relationships with Parents	1	B3
Managerial	1	B1

The second interview question asked was, What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an assistant principal? This question had five coded themes. The themes that encompassed the responses for this interview question included, Relationships with Students, Impact on Student (Academic, Social Emotional) Career, Instructional Leader, Relationships with Parents, and Managerial). Each of these themes is described.

**Theme: Relationships with Students**

The greatest coded theme (nine) for the second interview question was Relationships with Students. Nine of the participating assistant principals responded forming relationships with students was the most rewarding duty or task assistant principals experience. These responses express making relationships, connections and having everyday contact with students to be the most enjoyable element of being an assistant principal (A1, A2, B1, B2, B4, B5). One participant stated, “The most satisfying aspect is the interactions with the kids and communicating with kids” (B5). C3 also expressed enjoyment watching the students’ gradually mature over time through the development of these relationships.

Two participants shared that character education programs help to further develop positive relationships with students. A3 shared she enjoys the program they established at her school because she “gets to meet with kids who are caught doing something good”. B3 also discussed his enjoyment with the student recognition system they created at his school. “Most days, I am the big fat meany, but I have been fortunate enough to make pretty good relationships with a lot of the kids in the school and they trust me.”

**Theme: Impact on Student (Academic, Social Emotional) Career**

The second greatest coded theme (eight) to the second interview question was, Impact on Student (Academic, Social Emotional) Career. Eight of the participating assistant principals responded that having an impact on a student’s educational and or social career were one of the most rewarding duties or tasks of an assistant principal. One of the participants stated,

It’s a really nice balance. In yes, you are out of the classroom, which is a very scary jump to take, but I deal with kids all day, and yes, I do discipline, but you are also being pro-active with kids that may be at-risk (B4).

Two of the participants expressed the strong pleasure they receive from helping students when they are having a difficult time. “I think most rewarding for me is really taking those kids who are struggling along the way and trying to help them to be successful” (C4). Participant C2 said, “helping a student through a difficult time and having that student in some way relay to me that something that I have said or done has helped him or her” is very rewarding. Participant B3 also expressed that working with individual students to correct inappropriate behaviors and seeing the change that takes

place as rewarding. “We had some kids whose behaviors over the past year; changes really have taken a turn for the better based on some of the things that we have kind of instituted” (B3). He also shared that being there and showing you care is a rewarding task of an assistant principal. He said,

Seeing the light go on and then having maybe, create more self-respect within a particular kid is rewarding. You know...some of the times, it is a disciplinary thing where you see a kid recognize the mistakes they have may have made in the past and move on and become better people (B3).

Helping students make better decisions and seeing them grow into carrying individuals was described as very rewarding for an assistant principal (B5 & C3).

Along with the social emotional impact assistant principals play in student’s lives, one participant stated having an impact on a student’s understanding of the importance an education plays in his or her life to provide an “opportunity for them to pursue whatever it is that they want to do in life” as very rewarding (B1). Another participant replied,

I think probably the most rewarding is when you work with a young person and you are able to adjust their behavior... I have the opportunity to work with a young person who may not at first, may not have seen value in learning. Then realizes that learning is something intrinsically human and that not only human, but also they can do it, and that they start to learn in school not to just get grades, which is a small part in the process, but um, learning to better themselves, learn to better their minds and expand their genomes (C1).

**Theme: Instructional Leadership**

The third greatest coded theme (six) to the second interview question was Instructional Leadership. An instructional leader is defined as a leader who focuses on strengthening teaching and learning (Green, 2010; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2010; (Green, 2010; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2010; Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, et al., 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty 2005). Six of the participating assistant principals responded that being an instructional leader was one of the most rewarding duties and responsibilities of being an assistant principal.

The participants who provided responses that fit this theme spoke about working with teachers to help them improve their instruction in order to improve the students' education. (A2, A3, B5). One participant stated, "When I've worked with teachers and we talk about things they can try and when they change things or come up with new things based on our discussion, I really love that, I find that really rewarding" (A1). Another participant said, "Being in this role sort of allows me to make, you know, key decisions that effect Kindergarten through third grade instruction and the teaching and learning that goes on" (B2). Another participant responded, "I am becoming a resource for teachers as it comes to instruction and that is quite rewarding" (C2). He also shared,

Knowing that as a leader in the building, I am putting my spin and my vision on things has it's own rewards. You know, seeing something that you planned or thought of, you know maybe you planted a seed and people jumped on the idea and you watch your ideas flourish, that is also something that I enjoy (C2).

**Theme: Relationships with Parents**

One participating assistant principal responded that creating positive relationships with parents was one of the most rewarding duty or task of an assistant principal. He said over the years he has dealt with situations that have taken a turn for the better based on some of the things that we have kind of instituted...working closely with parents to help the family develop some type of a plan within the household...whoever they might be, so that's kind of rewarding too (B3).

### **Managerial**

One of the participating assistant principals responded that managerial tasks were some of the most rewarding duty or task of an assistant principal. She stated, "I like to do scheduling. I like to do problem solving...I like managing the day to day, the little things for people, being a resource and a support for the staff, so that their needs can be met" (B1).

Table 9

#### *Interview Question 3 Themes*

Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?		
Theme	Number of participants with a response which fits criteria	Assistant Principal Codes who responded
Instructional Leadership	7	A3, B1, B2, B4, B5, C1, C2
Communication	6	B3, B5, C1, C2, C3, C4
Visionary Leadership	5	A1, A2, B2, C2, B4
Flexible Decision Maker	5	A1, A3, B5, C2, C3
Personnel Decisions	4	A1, A2, B1, B2
Managerial	3	B5, C1, C2
Organized	1	C2

The third interview question was What are the most important job requirements of a principal? This question had seven coded themes. The themes that encompassed the

responses for this interview question included, Instructional Leadership, Communication, Visionary Leadership, Flexible Decision Maker, Personnel Decisions, Managerial, and Organized. Each of these themes is described.

### **Theme: Instructional Leadership**

There were seven participating assistant principals who provided responses that fit the theme, Instructional Leadership. An instructional leader is defined as a leader who focuses on strengthening teaching and learning (Green, 2010; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2010; Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, et al., 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty 2005). Seven of the participating assistant principals responded that being an instructional leader was one of the most important job requirements of a principal.

Several of the participants responded that an important responsibility of the principalship is to work with and support all members of the school (A3, B1, C1). B4 described the principal she works for as a “true teacher.” Another participant shared that a principal has the responsibility of being knowledgeable about what is happening in the building, in education globally and knowing about their community (C2). On top of this knowledge base, one participant said the principal is responsible for setting the “expectations about kids, expectations about learning and the kind of things that are going to happen in the classroom in terms of um instruction, in terms of the social and emotional growth” (B2). Another participant shared a similar perspective, “a principal must be in classrooms improving instruction, making sure that, you know, the proper instruction is taking place” (B5).

Other participants also described the role of principal as a supporting role to benefit instruction. “The important requirements of a principal, I feel is that of a

supporting role, to support the teachers, the students, support the assistant principals” (A3). It was also expressed that “one of the most important things is to retain and support your staff that are doing a great job” (B1). In order to do this, B1 said providing teachers with professional development is essential, “which is something I don’t think that we, we have a difficult time managing that” (B1).

### **Theme: Communication**

Six of the participating assistant principals responded that communication was one of the most important job requirements of a principal. Two participants described the importance of a principal being able to communicate because they “have to be in touch with all of the elements that make up the district” (C1, C2). C1 described this as a “more global vantage point where they get to sort of work with multiple facets and make connections between them.” Participant B5 described that it is the responsibility of the principal to handle and communicate the serious issues. “When it deals with communication with the superintendent on different issues that are taking place within the district, the principal handles all of those phone calls if it is a more serious issue” (B5).

It was also expressed that part of communication is developing relationships to get the job done.

I would say communication is important because you have to develop relationships. You have to develop sound relationships with kids and sound relationships with families, teachers and everything because you’re sometimes the go between. I would say communication would be up there as a priority (C4).

Participant C3 also described the ability to communicate as an important function of a principal. This participant said the importance of communication and “being able to be humble enough to reach out to your colleagues and other administrators for assistance to find better ways and easier ways to do things, that’s part of communication.” Another participant stated, “Being able to delegate responsibilities is extremely important, the ability to communicate” (B3).

### **Theme: Visionary Leadership**

Five of the participating assistant principals provided responses that fit into the Visionary Leadership theme. They indicated that having a vision as a principal was also one of the most important job requirements of the principalship. Visionary Leadership is defined as the ability to set the tone for the school, establish the climate of a school and communicate and influence the faculty of the school towards a shared vision (Covey, 1990, Green, 2010; Rubin 2009).

One participant said that a principal must, “make everything kind of come together because it is a big puzzle and you have to make sure the pieces kind of fit” (A1). In order to do this, C2 said that a principal must first have a “strong vision” and “be able to communicate that vision.” Another participant said, “A big goal for a principal is to have a vision and to see how all the pieces or components between the students, the staff, the community, how they relate to one another” (A2). Similar to A1’s response, participant B2 stated, “The principal sets the tone for the whole building...you know, the message they are sending.” To further illustrate the importance of setting the tone for the building, one participant said, “What I see as one of the most important responsibly of the principal is creating the culture...the little details and the big details,



but if the culture of the school is not healthy, safe and productive, all of the other stuff can't kind of fall into place" (B4).

**Theme: Flexible Decision Maker**

Five of the participating assistant principals responded that being a flexible decision maker was one of the most important job requirements of a principal. One participant stated, "One of the most important job requirements is to be an open decision maker for the entire building globally" (A3). It was described that a principal has the responsibility of dealing with the heavy stuff (B5), while knowing how to be really flexible (A1) in order to problem solve (C3). Similarly, another participant stated, "I think a good leader is someone who is great with people and somebody who is not overly ridged" (C2).

**Theme: Personnel Decisions**

Four of the participating assistant principals responded that dealing with personnel decisions was an important job requirement of a principal. One participant discussed how the tenure laws and determining whom to retain was very difficult. "The way the tenure system is right now, when you're, um doing your observations of your non-tenured staff, you want to try and support them and try and make decisions as to whether they should be retained or not" (B1). Another participant discussed the importance of retaining and placing personnel as important human resource decisions. "For example, our financial resources and sort of our personnel resources and to make the decisions of who we should put where" (B2). "I think that interpersonal skills are really vital to be able to be a successful principal because you really are balancing personalities in staff and teachers and students and families and the community" (A1).

A2 also described the importance of personnel decisions as “Knowing where people’s strengths and then areas of support are, and then helping them to move forward to improve themselves, thereby improving the institution as a whole.”

**Theme: Managerial**

Three of the participating assistant principals responded that dealing with managerial issues were important job requirements of the principalship. Theme Managerial describes the role of providing the necessary resources, dealing with paperwork, budgeting, scheduling and dealing with the day-to-day operations of a school.

Participant C2 stated that an important responsibility of the principalship is being able to “deal with the day-to-day trials and tribulations.” Another example of the managerial responsibilities of the principalship is “Making sure that teachers are, you know, have the necessary tools that they need to deliver purposeful and meaningful instruction” (B5). A third participant stated that a principal’s responsibility, “includes budgeting and scheduling and includes some of the logistical pieces of being a school leader and so I think that might be the most important” (C1).

**Theme: Organized**

One of the participating assistant principals responded that being organized was the most important job requirement of a principal. “They have to be organized... I think that they have to be organized and have follow through and have strong pre-planning and execution and debriefing” (C2).

Table 10

*Interview Question 4 Themes*

Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?		
Theme	Number of participants with a response which fits criteria	Assistant Principal Codes who responded
Time	5	A2, B2, B3, B4, C1
Difficult Parents	4	A1, A3, B1, B5
Managerial	4	A1, A2, A3, B4
Personnel Decisions	3	B2, B3, C3
Communication	2	A2, B5
Responsibility	2	A3, C2
Instructional Leader	1	B5
Politics	1	C3
Discipline	1	A1

The fourth interview question asked, What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal? This question had nine coded themes. The themes that encompassed the responses for this interview question included, Time, Difficult Parents, Managerial, Personnel, Communication, Responsibility, Instructional Leader, Politics and Discipline. Each of these themes is described.

**Theme: Time**

Five of the participating assistant principals responses fit the theme, Time. I have defined the theme time for this study as the amount of hours principals work each week, the lack of time during the day to accomplish all of the responsibilities due to vast job description of the principalship and the difficulty of balancing work and life.

One participant said, “Late nights or work on the weekends” was one of the most difficult duties of the principalship (B4). Other responses expressed the lack of time to accomplish the job responsibilities of the principalship. Due to the lack of time in the day, it was described that it was difficult to keep all the balls up in the air (A2, B2). “I

have to say time... there is never enough time in the day to do the things that you need to do... So I guess time management probably sometimes would be the most difficult thing” (B3).

Another participant discussed the importance of being visible during the day, but because of the workload and lack of time, being visible was one of the most difficult duties of a principal,

I think being visible is the most difficult. Um it's so easy to sit down and take care of the paperwork during the 9. I wish it was 9, during the 7 to 3 time period it is so easy to say I am going to write this report now and it is harder to say I am going to write that report at three o'clock.... Sacrifices to life because life for you also starts at three o'clock and so how you manage to balance that? That has been something that I have been challenged with my whole career because you only get face time with the kids, you know, um from seven to three and how you balance that with your responsibilities of getting your tasks done. While I think it is very important to be visible, I think it is also very challenging (C1).

### **Theme: Difficult Parents**

Four of the participating assistant principals responded that dealing with difficult parents proved to be one of the most difficult duty or task of a principal. They stated that dealing with difficult or unreasonable parents, and families made the job of principal very difficult (A1, A3, B1, B5).

### **Theme: Managerial**

Four of the participating assistant principals responded that dealing with managerial issues was one of the most difficult duty or task of a principal. Theme

Managerial describes the role of providing the necessary resources, dealing with paperwork, budgeting, scheduling and dealing with the day-to-day operations of a school.

Several participating assistant principals responded that paperwork was a most difficult duty or task of a principal. One participant stated, “Emails and all this stuff that keeps you in your office... Sometimes I think principals are bogged down with a lot of minutia from parents, from central office” (A2). Similar to A2, participant B4 responded,

I think that there is paperwork that sometimes can be a big part of the job... I feel like there is always going to be paperwork that needs to be done. Um and there is always going to be the time of responding to emails (B4).

Participant A3 shared that another difficult task of a principal is managing the budget. Another participant responded that facility management was a most difficult duty or task of a principal. She expressed that at her school they lack resources,

We don’t have the facilities that we need to do what we need to do and there is not a lot that we can do about that. I can’t come in earlier tomorrow to add a new classroom or two on. Umm, we don’t have the space that we need, we don’t have the storage that we need and we have to work very creatively, teachers have to be really flexible and cooperative with each other just to be able to do what we need to do to get done and it is really not optimal in that way. So I would say that would be my second biggest challenge (A1).

**Theme: Personnel Decisions**

Three of the participating assistant principals responded that personnel decisions were some of the most difficult duties or tasks of a principal. One participant stated

I guess I would say, um working with teachers who are not up to the level or up to the expectations that we want or at the place we want them to be and they're tenured... I think working with a teacher who (a) could be difficult or (b) does not have the capacity to sort of do the work that we are asking them to do (B2).

B3 expressed similar concerns. He said,

I would say personnel decisions sometimes are tuff decisions to make. You know whether or not you are going to rehire a person, you need to fire a person, let someone go, um, creating an action plan for a teacher....That would be some of the tougher decisions to make (B3).

Aligned with the participants B2 and B3, participant C3 expressed that reprimanding personnel can be very difficult at times. "I would also imagine that the human resource piece in reprimanding and dealing with, you know people the same age or younger than you, teachers in the building and do that in a professional way could be very challenging" (C3).

**Theme: Communication**

Two of the participants responded that communication was one of the most difficult duty or task of a principal. For this theme, I have defined communication as keeping all stakeholders (parents, teachers, community, boards of education, students, and central office) informed. One participant stated that communicating and "Keeping your stakeholders, keeping all of your stakeholders in the loop" is a difficult task of the

principalship (B5). A second participant said, “I think communication is hard.... We need the support from central office administrators as well as clear communication and sometimes that is not always prevalent” (A2).

### **Theme: Responsibility**

Two of the participants responded the high level of responsibility that comes with the role was a difficult duty or task of a principal. One participant stated, “I think that the notion that the buck stops with you outside of the superintendent is in itself, pretty daunting” (C2).

### **Theme: Instructional Leader**

One of the participating assistant principals responded that being an instructional leader was one of the most difficult duty or task of a principal. An instructional leader is defined as a leader who focuses on strengthening teaching and learning (Green, 2010; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2010; Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, et al., 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty 2005). Participant B5 said, “Making sure that curriculum is aligned...Making sure that the teachers are teaching to the standards....Making sure that the teachers are differentiating instruction and meeting the needs of all learners” is a very difficult job requirement of the principalship.

### **Theme: Politics**

One of the participants responded that dealing with the political nature of the job was one of the most difficult duty or task of the principalship. In the political arena, a principal has to work with all stakeholders (parents, teachers, community, boards of education, students, and central office). This participant expressed how this is a very

difficult task for a principal. He said, “I would say the political nature of the job could be tiring” (C3).

### **Theme: Discipline**

One of the participating assistant principals responded that dealing with discipline was one of the most difficult duty or task of a principal. A1 said, “Dealing with challenging issues or behaviors we are trying to solve” is a very difficult task of the principalship.”

Table 11

#### *Interview Question 5 Themes*

Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?		
Theme	Number of participants with a response which fits criteria	Assistant Principal Codes who responded
Next Step	7	A1, A2, A3, B2, B4, B5, C4
Positive Experience as Assistant Principal	6	A2, A3, B4, B5, C1, C2
Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference	6	A2, B2, B3, C2, C3, C4
Gaining Confidence	4	B5, C2, C3, C4
Financial Incentives	2	A2, B1

The fifth interview question asked, What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal? This question had five coded themes. The themes that encompassed the responses for this interview question included, Next Step, Positive Experience as Assistant Principal, Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference, Gaining Confidence, and Financial Incentives. Each of these themes is described.

### **Theme: Next Step**



Seven of the participants responded taking the next step was a factor that could motivate and inspire assistant principals to pursue employment as a principal. Theme Next Step describes assistant principal's desire for change, or growth in career to move up the career ladder. Several participants expressed that assistant principals may be ready to move on, ready for the next step (A1, A2, A3, B5). One participant said, "I think that just some people just want to continue to, you know, their growth in education" (C4).

One participant shared, "I think for the most part, people come into the position knowing that they eventually want to lead their own school" (B2). Another participant shared, "You don't want to die a vice principal. You're being trained to be a principal some day, whatever that day may be, it might be 5 years, it might be 10 years, it might be 20 years, but at some point you are being trained to be the principal" (B4).

#### **Theme: Positive Experience as Assistant Principal**

Six of the participants responded that having positive experiences as an assistant principal was a factor that could motivate and inspire assistant principals to pursue a principalship. Theme Positive Experiences as Assistant Principal describes pleasurable experiences in the role of assistant principal, while working with and learning from their principal who acted as a mentor. Several of the participants expressed how their assistant principalship was a training ground for the principalship because their principal mentored them. One participant said,

It is your prior experiences because perhaps you have known someone in your life who really impacted you in a certain way... I think of my current principal and just as a beginning teacher, she hired me and now I have the fortune to work

under her and learn from her and just being, she is a mentor and that just makes me want to aspire to move further in my career (A2).

Another participant shared, “I think what motivates them is a strong partnership between them, the assistant principal and the principal, effective communication between them, shared responsibility” (C1). Participant B5 discussed the supportive relationship between the assistant principal and principal as a motivating factor,

I can definitely see myself working under him for you know 5 years maybe more, but you know, I am learning a lot from him and taking a lot in from him and that motivates me to want to have my own building, you know, and do what he is doing and to teach somebody underneath me and so the fact that I have such a strong principal and someone that I respect that’s a motivating factor for me to want to do what he is doing (B5).

Comparable to A2, C1, and B5, participants A3, and B4, expressed similar positive experiences. “I’m learning a lot by watching principals” (A3). “You know, you start to acquire how you handled different situations in the past and how you handle them moving forward to be fair and safe for everybody” (B4).

### **Theme: Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference**

Six of the participating assistant principals responded that leadership aspirations to make a difference as being a factor that could motivate and inspire assistant principals to pursue a principalship. Theme Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference describes assistant principal’s internal motivation to aspire to be a principal who makes a difference by applying their vision and philosophy of education.

When asked what motivates an assistant principal to pursue a principalship, one participant responded, “From my perspective the biggest factor would be just thinking that you can do things better or wanting to do things different” (C4). Another participant shared that an assistant principal moving into a principalship would allow them to,

Bond their vision and what they think, you know, how a school should run...

Maybe they have their own ideas and they maybe would to do something a little differently and they um, realize that in the role that they are in they maybe cannot do that. So they want to do it, so they sort of move on to put themselves in a position where they can do it.... There comes a point where assistant principals get frustrated in terms of you know, I can only do so much here so I am going to move on (B2).

Several participants also expressed the feeling that moving into a principalship would provide an opportunity to be a leader,

It comes down to the idea of leadership. Are you a person that wants to be a leader, a person that eventually one-day wants to run your own building? You know, I say to myself do I have the qualities to run a school effectively?...I think it is the idea of ambition the idea of leadership (B3).

Another participant stated, “I think it is good to be more egocentric. You think you can change things, you think you can do things better....Fulfilling that, what you are supposed to do, that drive, that goal that you might have had when you started that trip” (C3).

**Theme: Gaining Confidence**

Four of the participants responded that as assistant principals gain confidence they could become motivated and inspired to pursue a principalship. One participant stated, “I think it is gaining the confidence of your current staff” (B5). Two participants responded,

I find that more and more I watch what my principal does and think not that I disagree with what he is doing but there are times that I think I would do things differently and I feel confident that the way I would do it would work best for me. And I think personally as I have those feelings more and more, then perhaps I am ready to jump into the position (C2).

When you get some of that positive feedback from teachers that you are doing a good job, for me that is a motivating factor and I know that I have the potential to go to the next step of actually having my own building (B5).

**Theme: Financial Incentive**

Two of the participants responded that financial incentives could be a factor that motivates and inspires assistant principals to pursue employment as a principal. The responses from the two participants that fit this theme indicated that advancing on the guide and an increased salary could be a motivating factor to pursue a principalship (A2, B1).

Table 12

*Interview Question 6 Themes*

Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?		
Theme	Number of participants with a response which fits criteria	Assistant Principal Codes who responded
Time	7	A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B4, C3
Lack of Confidence	6	A2, A3, B1, C2, C3, C4
Responsibility	6	A2, B1, B2, B3, B4, C2
Content Being Assistant Principal	3	B2, B4, B5
Difficult Parents	2	B3, B4
Further Removed From Students	1	C1

The sixth interview question was, What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship? This question had six coded themes. The themes that encompassed the responses for this interview question included, Time, Lack of Confidence, Responsibility, Content Being Assistant Principal, Difficult Parents, and Further Removed from Students. Each of these themes will be described.

**Theme: Time**

Seven of the participating assistant principals responded that time was a deterrent to applying for a principalship. I have defined the theme Time for this study as the amount of hours principals work each week, the lack of time during the day to accomplish all of the responsibilities due to the vast job description of the principalship and the difficulty of balancing work and life.

Several of the participants indicated the principalship requires a very big time commitment (A2, A3, A4), which can be a deterrent to qualified candidates for applying for a principalship. One participant expressed the insignificant increase in salary for the

extended time required of being a principal as being a deterrent. He expressed that it was not worth it due to the “amount of hours you might be working for that extra 500 dollars a month” (C3).

Five participants expressed a concern of the principalship was balancing work and personal life due to the amount of time required of the principalship. One participant stated, “I think the time commitment is a big deal. I mean if this was 20 years ago, I definitely would not be working as an administrator” (A1). Similar to A1, another participant said, “It is a huge time commitment. I think that sometimes that can be in terms of a work-life balance” (B2). Also expressing the difficulty of balancing work and life as a principal due to the amount of time the position demands, three participants described how having a family could further deter a qualified candidate from applying for a principalship (A2, B1, B4, C3). One participant said, “People who have families say, can I really do that forcibly at this point in life for my career?” (A2). Another participant described this deterrent by saying, “Some people might say, hey I have a family and I’m not ready to become a principal yet because I can’t commit to every single night for meetings” (B4).

### **Theme: Lack of Confidence**

Six of the participating assistant principals responded that lack of confidence was a deterrent to applying for a principalship. These participants indicated that potential candidates could be deterred from pursuing a principalship due to a lack of confidence (A2, A3, C2). One participant indicated assistant principals may “see what the current administrators do and feel, oh, I don’t know if I can handle a parent, or budgets are not my thing, or how do I put it all together?” (A2). Another participant said,

It could be a question of lack of confidence, that although they do the assistant principal job quite well and they understand their duties. They may not feel all that confident even though they had been trained and they have been certified to be a principal they don't feel confident in their ability to bring that content to light as a principal you know their knowledge of a policy a law or a procedure (C2).

Several participants also indicated that potential applicants might lack confidence due to the fact they are unwilling to leave a secure place, or give up tenure (A2, C3, C4). One participant stated, "you are moving into a non-tenured position again and some people don't want to take that risk" (A2). Similarly, C3 said, "As for job security wise, evaluation systems for administrators, you are leaving a secure place as being an assistant principal." One participant shared that a potential applicant may lack confidence due to the unknown. "The unknown, the unknown of the culture, the town, the politics. And I think job security would need to be mentioned because when you leave a secure place in which you know and love, taking that jump and maybe it not be a good fit could be frightening. It's a risk" (C4).

One participant also indicated that potential applicants might lack the confidence and feel they need to continue to learn as an assistant principal. "Certain people, like myself, may feel that they want to become better at different topics, whether it would be scheduling or budgeting or dealing with the public or the politics of the position before pursuing a principalship" (B1).

**Theme: Responsibility**

Six of the participating assistant principals responded that the responsibility of being a principal was a deterrent to applying for a principalship. Several of the participants stated that the principal has a lot of work and responsibility (A2, B4). One said, “I think the amount of responsibility that is placed on people sometimes is a deterrent” (B3).

The notion of being the main person in charge was also mentioned by two participants as being a deterrent for potential applicants. When asked to provide perspectives as to why potential applicants would not apply, several participants stated, “Being the main person in charge” (B2). “Perhaps being nervous or anxious about him or her being the only, the top dog in the building....To have the greatest responsibility to fall on their shoulders....The principal has the responsibility of being the face of the building....They may like their administrative tasks as an assistant principal, but you know, when the limelight is more focused on them that might not be the best thing” (C2).

The accountability measures were also expressed as an added responsibility of the principalship. One participant said,

As we move forward in the years, there is going to be a lot more accountability for administrators for the schools....There is a big lens on us now, that and I think that, umm, sometimes that scares people you know (A2).

Another participant stated, “I think that maybe the responsibility that comes with being a principal now with the new laws and stuff, people might say I don’t want that. I’m ok being a vice principal” (B4). Also indicating laws and mandates as an added responsibility of the principal and a deterring factor for qualified candidates, B5 said,



Well, there is a lot of them out there now. We deal with the whole New Jersey harassment intimidation bullying law....If you don't know how to budget your time and prioritize and take a deep breath and really see what's most important and see what do I really need to address first I think that it could be a very difficult and overwhelming job (B5).

**Theme: Content Being Assistant Principal**

Two of the participants responded that being content as an assistant principal could be a contributing factor to why assistant principals are deterred from applying for a principalship. One participant stated the position of assistant principal could fulfill “their passion working with kids... I think some people can be sort of content and not have the motivation to sort of move on” (B2) because “some people are okay with just staying comfortable” (B4).

**Theme: Difficult Parents**

Two of the participating assistant principals responded that dealing with difficult parents was a deterrent to applying for a principalship because “at times, it feels like a thankless position” (B3). Another participant said,

Just the demand of the parents. I think that is one of the most deterring factors you know being a principal...Assistant principal, principal is a lot different than 20, 25, 30 years ago. I mean now with the Internet and all the technology. I mean things are now just right at our fingertips and parents now will just contact you within a second and their expectation is like they expect a response immediately (B4).

### Theme: Further Removed From Students

One of the participating assistant principals responded that moving from assistant principal to principal would result in being further removed from the students and could be a deterrent for potential applicants to apply for a principalship. She said,

What's been hard for me in moving further is separating further from the students. Because sometimes when you move to the upper tiers you lose involvement one-on-one with younger people and it is more involvement with them as let's say as an ID number. ...I don't always see my principal knowing our children the way I might know them or the way that my staff might know them... I think that will become more and more of a downfall for me because I love working with young people (C1).

Table 13

#### *Interview Question 7, Part 1.*

Question Seven: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?		
Assistant Principal	Yes	No
A1:	X	
A2:	X	
A3:	X	
B1:		X
B2:	X	
B3:	X	
B4:	X	
B5:	X	
C1:		X
C2:	X	
C3:	X	
C4:	X	
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>

The first part of question 7, Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? provided data regarding whether or not the assistant principal participants were interested in pursuing a principalship. Ten of the participants indicated that they were interested in pursuing a principalship and two indicated that they were not interested in pursuing a principalship.

Table 14

*Interview Question Themes*

Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?		
Theme	Number of participants with a response which fits criteria	Assistant Principal Codes who responded
<b>Motivation</b>		
Growing as an Administrator	7	A1, A2, A3, B2, B3, B4, B5
Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference	4	A2, B2, C2, A3, C2, B3
Gaining Confidence	3	A3, C2, B3
<b>Deterrent</b>		
Content Being Assistant Principal	1	B1
Less Curriculum & Instruction	1	C1

The second part of question 7, Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship? provided data to explain the factors of why the participants were or were not interested in pursuing a principalship. For this question, there were five coded themes, three themes expressed motivating factors to pursue a principalship and two themes expressed the deterrents for not pursuing a principalship. The themes for this interview question included, Growing as an Administrator, Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference, Gaining Confidence, Lack of Confidence and Less Curriculum and Instruction. The themes will be described.

### **Theme: Growing as an Administrator**

Seven participants indicated the assistant principalship has been a learning opportunity to grow as an administrator, which is why they are motivated to pursue a principalship. One participant said,

I think that I am viewing that in the same way that I viewed going from teacher to administrator is, I am learning as I go...creating ideas, coming up with ideas about how I would do this, how I would do that. Umm, kind of coming up with my own vision of the way I would do it when I was principal (A1).

Another participant discussed how the assistant principalship has been a learning process.

As an assistant principal you learn from your principal, but then you also generate ideas of your own, and you say to yourself what is it going to feel like to have your own building or your own school and what would happen if we tried this and what if we did this? (A2).

Similar to A2's response, participant B5 expressed how he has been learning on the job and growing as an administrator.

I see that I can do the job. You know, I know I have a lot to learn but in anything else like a lot of us, we learn on the job, but I have the right person that I am working for now. I have the right support. I am confident that I can do this job and do a pretty good job based on the feedback from my teachers (B5).

Also indicating that the assistant principal position has been a training ground, participant B2 said, "I think to motivate me it's the kind of thing that I see this as training to do that. I think logically to me that that's the next step." One participant also

expressed the influence of the principal. “I think I am still learning it all, everything I can from my current principal, but I definitely someday see myself as a principal” (B4). Similar to B4, another participant said, “I am, I think, um, I feel that in year two of my administrative career I am more prepared than I was in year one and partly it is because of the principal that I work for” (B5).

Participant B3 discussed growing as an administrator and gaining the tools to perform in a principalship,

I have been able to communicate effectively with people here at our school. The parents, booster clubs, those sorts of things. So I think that I have the necessary tools. Obviously, you still have a lot to learn. My principal is going into his 35<sup>th</sup> year in education and his 12th or 13th year as a principal and you know it is something that we discuss all the time, is making sure you have an open mind and are ready to learn new things.

### **Theme: Leadership Aspirations Make a Difference**

Four participants expressed that they are motivated to pursue a principalship because they have aspirations to make a difference. Theme Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference describes assistant principal’s internal motivation to aspire to be a principal who makes a difference by applying their vision and philosophy of education.

One participant shared that she is interested in having her “ideas come to fruition...you know, working with the teachers, working with them at a different level” (A2). A2 also indicated that she is motivated because she sees the principalship rewarding due to the fact that you “are able to have influence over many different areas, you know, whether it is the students, the parents, curriculum.”

Participant B2 also indicated that she was interested in applying the “things that I’m seeing here, that I have gathered from experiences and watching other people and sort of apply to my own school one day” (B2). Another participant indicated that he is having more and more days where he feels he is ready to “lead a building with teachers and students and a community of parents, which is why I am putting my name out there” (C2). Similar to A2, B2, and C2, participant B3 stated,

I feel I am a person who is going to make decisions that are going to help all parties be successful. Sometimes you are going to make tougher decisions people aren’t going to be happy with, but ultimately the goal is to make sure that we’re creating the best opportunities for our kids to succeed. We want to put them in the best possible situation. So I look forward to the opportunity to become a principal (B3).

### **Theme: Gaining Confidence**

The third theme, Gaining Confidence, describes two participants’ additional motivations for pursuing a principalship. They shared as they are learning in their role as assistant principal, they are developing more confidence and feel they will be ready sooner than later to pursue a principalship. One participant stated, “I am interested in becoming a principal sooner rather than later...because I think that I can do that at this point” (A3). Another participant said,

I am the type of person looking to be a principal at some point. I will be honest with you and say not always do I feel 100% confident that I can do the job well as a principal. There are some days that I go home and say gosh, I could have done what my principal did today and I will be just fine. You know, my content

knowledge is strong and my people skills are good or whatever. And there are days that I feel, gosh let's just keep learning (C2).

**Theme: Content Being Assistant Principal**

One participant expressed the deterrent of a lack of confidence, which indicate why she was not interested in pursuing a principalship. She stated,

This is my opinion. For me currently, I like my role as a vice principal and I currently don't have any aspirations to become a principal at this point, whether that may be true down the road, I don't know. I like, um, I still feel that I am in a learning phase and I still feel that I have a lot more learning to do before I could assume that role (B1).

**Theme: Less Curriculum and Instruction**

One participant indicated that a deterrent for her is based on her perception that there is a lack of curriculum and instruction in the principalship. She said,

I want to try to get into central office curriculum and instruction work...in principal work, I think there is less curriculum and instruction work than there is in this work that I do because at least I get a cohort of teachers that I get to supervise and work directly with and a principalship um that's not always the case (C1).

**Follow-Up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

Two follow-up questions were asked of each participant. I have provided participant responses that provide additional information pertaining to the guiding research question of this study, To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the

principal impact assistant principals' perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations? The full transcripts are provided in Appendix B.

All participants were asked the first follow-up question but not all participants provided an answer, indicating that we covered all material or they would email me if they thought of anything they failed to provide. The responses provided below were chosen because they linked to the research questions for this study.

One participant indicated that she felt pursuing a principalship is the next logical step for an assistant principal.

Logically to me it is rare to me to think that assistant principals wouldn't want to move on. To me, it is a logical next step in the progression. I can't imagine a lot of people take this job being content being an assistant principal their whole life, but I know there are people who are (B2).

Another participant indicated that she felt an assistant principal's experience due to the principal they work for or school they work in could impact their aspirations for career advancement,

I think the one factor you can't predict is just the culture and climate of the school. If you have an administration that doesn't communicate, if you have an administration where it is top heavy and the vice principal doesn't have any power to you know you might have a totally different experience. I feel very lucky that I am having the experience that I am having...but I think in a different situation or a different climate you could have a very negative experience as a vice principal and say I don't want to move forward with this, this is crazy...



You know some schools, I think with all the laws I think that just the society we live in some vice principals are dealing with discipline all day where they are just trying to keep the peace where that's not my experience. I am very lucky, we have great students, parents that are really involved, Um I think it's the greatest school in America (B4).

She also indicated that assistant principals are younger today than they once were and acquiring a principalship sooner and staying in that position for much longer,

I know that in just the NJL2L program there's a lot of young vice principals where I feel like many years ago people weren't becoming principals and staying in that job for 30 years and not going anywhere. Now there is more change over where you can become a vice principal and in two years you can be a principal (B4).

**Follow-Up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

All participants were asked the second follow-up question. The responses I included are linked to the research questions for this study. The full transcripts are provided in Appendix B.

One participant discussed the importance of making mistakes and learning from others. She said,

I would say going into a principal position is just like when I initially came into the assistant principal position. I have to be ready to make mistakes and ready to learn from those mistakes and ready to learn from other people. So it might be the difficult things that I might not be exposed to that I have to be able to trust

other people, learn from other people. Know where to find, to be resourceful to get through that and to collaborate and trust your peers the difficult stuff (A3).

Another participant indicated the importance of holding onto what motivated you to become an educator because the position can be overwhelming. She said,

I think you have to hold onto the positives. You have to hold onto what motivated you and what inspired you at every different level. Whether it is teacher, whether it is assistant principal, because if you lose that, I think you become jaded and you become one of those pencil pushers. You know, one of those principals you hear about hopefully that you will never be, but you hear about and its just the person who shuts their door and just disappears. Um, there is no future for this school, there is not inspiration, there's no rallying the troops together you know (A2).

She also indicated the concerns she has moving into a principalship because of the accountability and responsibilities that come with the position,

We have this new principal evaluation system coming, and it will be assessing all of us as administrators that really holds us truly accountable and sometimes I get a little scared about that. It's like we have to have evidence for every single little thing. Its more than just a little agenda based, you have be on top of your game. You have to know everything and I am always scared. Am I always going to know what I am talking about? You know, I guess that's the tricky part, is just to make sure that I am aware of the changes that happen you know globally as well as locally in our schools and in our districts and then um being able to put it all

together in a package so that everyone can understand it and move forward with it (A2).

One participant provided a perspective that was shared with her as a graduate student,

I remember being in graduate school and I can remember the professor saying whatever you do don't be an assistant principal for more than seven years because you will be stuck there forever get out, it's a black hole (A1).

During this focus group session, A2 responded to A1's description of the assistant principalship as being a black hole. Participant A2 said,

That was the mantra of our former central administration. They said that you need to be out by 5 years. If you try to move on after that, not only do you become burnt out in that role and you should be moving on, but that people then will say why were you in this position for just so long. You should just naturally want to aspire to move on, although there are days that you always want to be an assistant because you can always blame the principal (A2).

Another response a participant provided described the importance of the relationship between the assistant principal and principal. She said,

I think that it is most important that um, assistant principals know their role and have that relationship with their principal in terms of how you are splitting up your responsibilities. So I guess the most important thing that we discussed today is that a principal sets the vision for the school and it's the assistant's role and primary responsibility to sort of follow and carry out that vision that was created (B2).

Participant B4 expressed the importance of keeping an open perspective and not losing sight when you have difficult days as an administrator. She said,

Um, I think the most important is probably why I love what I do and what part of the job is most rewarding because when you have hard days, I still have difficult days, I still have long days, I still have days I go home exhausted, but I love what I do and that's what keeps me, I like coming to work every day. I am passionate about what I do. I am vested in this school, so I want what's best for the students and the families. That those bad days, bad is not the right word, I guess difficult days don't outweigh all of the rewarding days and the great days that I have (B4).

Another participant expressed how society does not understand how difficult the role is of a school administrator,

I think that being a school leader um is an enormous responsibility. I think that um not everybody comprehends, I think that people in education, educators get it, but in this day and age in light of the tragedies, school shooting and storms and state standardized tests and mandates and all the different things that are out there I think that a lot of people don't truly realize the enormous amount of pressure that a good principal, a good school leader has on him or her and that I think that something to be taken out of this interview is something that its that you have to have pride in your job and you want to be able to do it, you want to be able to do it good and you want to help, you know the people in your community and it is a big responsibility....

Just for example, we were designated as a focus school and its because we have a significant difference in our state test scores between our Asian population and African American population and special education population and that and so right off the bat you know we are monitored from the state this year and that is an enormous amount of pressure that falls solely on the principal. You know it doesn't fall on the parents or the kids or the teachers for the most part it, it goes on the principal's and the assistant principal's shoulders you know so I think in a lot of cases the school leader is underappreciated and I don't think people realize the amount of pressure that we deal with on a day-to-day basis. It is a very honorable job, a tuff job you know, but we are in it for a reason you know and we are just trying to do right by kids right by trying to help your teachers do right by kids (B5).

Another participant indicated how difficult the role is of a building administrator.

He said,

There is so much that goes into the job of being a principal and being a building leader that it is difficult to encapsulate it into a couple of paragraphs. Being prepared. Easy days are easy, it's the tuff days that you have to worry about. The tuff days may involve contacting lawyers or dealing with very, very angry parents and I think that it is someone able to manage the ups and downs, the highs and lows of the job that is going to be most successful. Um, and while managing that also being able to bring good solid forward thinking to the table to push a building forward to be a visionary and to be able to execute that vision (C2).

Another participant indicated, “It’s a very difficult and demanding job. All eyes are on you and at times it can be a thankless job” (C3).

Participant C4 said, I think that it’s all about the kids, it all comes down to why you first started working in education. It’s to help the kids” (C4).

### **Summary**

The primary research question of this study was: To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the principal impact assistant principals’ perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations? To answer this main research question I had two guiding research question which include,

1. How do assistant principals perceive the role of the principal?
2. What are the factors that influence assistant principals motivation to seek or not seek a position as a school principal?

In order to provide data to answer the research questions I utilized seven interview questions to gather the data for this research study. For each interview question, I provided a description of how the participants responded categorized by the themes that emerged during the coding process. Five themes emerged in question 1, five in question 2, seven in question 3, nine in question 4, five in question 5, six in question 6, and five in question 7.

For question 1, Why did you become an administrator?, the most common responses were categorized in the themes Drive-Motivation, Greater Impact and Guided. The responses indicated that the participants pursued administration because they had internal motivation or drive to take on more responsibility and to impact a greater

number of children. It was also indicated that these participants were encouraged to pursue an administrative career within their school district.

For question 2, What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal, the most common responses were categorized in the themes Relations with Students, Impact on Student (Academic, Social Emotional) Career and Instructional Leadership. The responses indicated that the assistant principalship provided opportunities to form relationships, make connections and have a greater impact on children by strengthening teaching and learning.

For question 3, What are the most important job requirements of a principal?, the most common responses were categorized in the themes Instructional Leadership, Communication, Visionary Leadership, Flexible Decision Maker and Personnel Decisions. The responses indicated that a principal should be a flexible decision maker who focuses energy on strengthening teaching and learning while communicating a vision to promote and influences a school. It was also expressed that a principal must understand the personnel within the building to recognize their strengths and areas of needed support.

For question 4, What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?, the most common responses were categorized in the themes Time, Difficult Parents and Managerial. Responses indicating the lack of time to complete the duties of the principalship, such as paperwork, budgeting, scheduling and day-to-day responsibilities and the amount of hours a principal works made it difficult to balance work and personal life. Dealing with unreasonable parents, and families was also mentioned as a difficult task of the principalship.

For question 5, What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a principal?, the most common responses were categorized in the themes Next Step, Positive Experience as Assistant Principal and Leadership Aspirations. The participants attributed aspirations and the desire to take the next step to make a greater impact on teaching and learning by applying their own vision of education as motivation for pursuing a principalship. The experience assistant principals have while working with a principal was also discussed as having an impact on an assistant principal's motivation to pursue a principalship.

For question 6, *What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?*, the most common responses were categorized in the themes Time, Lack of Confidence and Responsibility. The amount of time required of the principalship results in the difficulty of balancing work and life and the lack of time during the day to accomplish all of the responsibilities due to a vast job description of the principalship was expressed as a deterrent. It was also mentioned that potential candidates could be deterred from pursuing a principalship because they lacked confidence due to the amount of responsibility and accountability of the principalship.

For question 7, *Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?*, 10 participants indicated they were interested in pursuing a principalship and two participants indicated they were not interested in pursuing a principalship. Three themes emerged that categorized motivating factors and two themes that categorized deterrents toward pursuing a principalship.



Seven participants indicated the assistant principalship has been a training ground to grow as an administrator, which is why they are motivated to pursue a principalship. It was also mentioned by the participants who aspired to obtain a principalship felt they had gained confidence while working as an assistant principal and were interested in obtaining a principalship to make a difference and apply their vision to a building of their own. Two participants indicated that they were not interested in pursuing a principalship due to a lack of confidence or they felt the principalship is farther removed from curriculum and instruction.

The data collected in this study indicated that the participants were first motivated to pursue an assistant principalship due to motivation to impact a greater number of students. As assistant principals, they expressed the connections with students and having a greater impact on teaching and learning as rewarding. They identified being flexible, focusing energy on instruction, communication and personnel issues as important requirements of the principalship. The lack of time to complete all responsibilities, the amount of hours principals work and dealing with difficult parents were identified as the most difficult tasks of a principal. When asked what motivates assistant principals to pursue a principalship they identified having the ability to apply their own vision of education to impact teaching and learning. The experience an assistant principal has was also linked to their desire to pursue a principalship. The amount of time, balancing work and life, the vast job descriptions and lack of confidence were identified as major deterrents for applying for a principalship. Finally, 10 participants indicated they were interested in pursuing a principalship because their assistant principalship provided them with the experiences and training they felt they

required. One participant indicated she did not currently have aspirations to advance to principal because she liked her role as assistant principal and felt she had more to learn, but she did not rule out the possibility of pursuing a principalship in the future. One felt that the principalship was farther removed from curriculum and instruction.

Chapter V will provide the summary of findings as they relate to the research questions and a discussion of how the findings relate to past research and the conceptual framework of this study.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship and their aspirations for career advancement. This study applied qualitative research methods utilizing a focus group session and in-depth interviews of assistant principals to bring light to the perceptions assistant principals hold toward the principalship. This chapter provides the summary of the findings as they relate to the research questions, a discussion of how the findings relate to past research and the conceptual framework of this study. Finally, the implications for policy, practice and future research is provided.

#### **Summary of the Findings**

There were a total of seven interview questions utilized to gather the data for this research study. Themes emerged through the process of coding the transcripts. The themes with the vast majority of the participants' responses will be provided in the discussion section of this chapter.

The data collected in this study indicated that the participants were first driven to pursue an assistant principalship due to motivation to impact a greater number of students and take on more responsibility. It was also indicated that as teachers, several of the participants were encouraged to pursue an administrative career within their school district. As assistant principals, the participants expressed enjoyment due to connections made with students and having a greater impact on teacher instruction and student learning.

The participants identified being flexible, focusing energy on instruction, communication, and personnel issues as important job requirements, which were also identified as some of the most difficult responsibilities of the principalship. The amount of hours principals work, dealing with difficult parents and the lack of time to complete their responsibilities were also indicated as some of the most difficult tasks of a principal.

When asked what motivates assistant principals to pursue a principalship, being an instructional leader and applying their own vision of education to impact teaching and learning was expressed. The experience an assistant principal has while working in a particular school or with a particular principal was identified as having an influence on an assistant principal's motivation to pursue a principalship. When asked to identify deterrents qualified candidates may have with regards to pursuing a principalship, the amount of time, balancing work and life, the vast job descriptions, being content as an assistant principal and lack of confidence were identified.

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of participants held aspirations of pursuing a principalship. Ten (83%) of the participants indicated they were interested in pursuing a principalship because they held the perception that their assistant principalship provided them with the experiences and training to be prepared for a principalship. One participant indicated she did not currently have aspirations to advance to principal because she liked her role as assistant principal and felt she had more to learn, but she did not rule out the possibility of pursuing a principalship in the future. Only one participant (.08%) indicated she was not interested in pursuing a principalship

because she perceived the role as being farther removed from curriculum and instruction and she had aspirations of pursuing a central office position.

The primary research question for this study was, To what extent, if any, do job requirements of the principal impact assistant principals' perceptions of the role of principal, and does this influence career aspirations? In order to assist in answering the primary research question, I utilized the following guiding questions:

1. How do assistant principals perceive the role of the principal?
2. What are the factors that influence assistant principals motivation to seek or not seek a position as a school principal?

The discussion section addresses each of the two research questions utilizing the seven interview questions. First, the data obtained from interview question one is offered to provide participant background information pertaining to this research study. Following this, the two research questions have been used as headings within the discussion section. Within each of the headings the themes representing the vast majority of participant responses that emerged through the coding process are provided. Interview questions 2, 3 and 4 were used to provide data for research question 1. Interview questions 5, 6 and 7 were used to provide data for research question 2.

### **Discussion**

This study began with an explanation of the national spotlight on education and holding teachers and administrators accountable for student performance. I provided a literature review on the importance of attracting, selecting and retaining effective principals because it has been identified that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at

school” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Washlstrom, 2004, p, 5). Then, I provided literature on the assistant principalship, the role of the principal and the concern of reluctant principal candidates. Finally, past dissertations with a similar focus to this research study were provided.

With respect to the conceptual framework for this study and to gain background information on what motivated the participants to originally pursue administration as a career, I asked the first interview question, Why did you become an administrator? The vast majority of participant responses described internal Drive-Motivation (67%) to pursue an assistant principalship. This followed Clayton Alderfer’s (year) existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG) theory. Alderfer’s ERG theory was used as a lens for the conceptual framework of this study.

Greater Impact (58%) was another motivating factor identified by the participants to pursue an assistant principalship. These participants shared perceptions that administration provided opportunities to have a greater impact on teacher instruction and student learning. This links to a previous statement in chapter one “educational leaders have the greatest impact, as the goals and sense of purpose they provide strengthens the entire staff” (ISLLC, 2008, p. 9).

Several participants also indicated they were Guided (50%) into an administrative career within the district they taught. This is an important finding. One could speculate that a principal has the duty to discover and mentor teachers who have the potential to be educational leaders. It has been said, “Strong educational leaders also attract, retain, and get the most out of talented teachers” (ISLLC, 2008, p. 9). Financial

incentive (17%) also motivated a couple of participants to move from teacher to an administrative position.

The second interview question, What are the most rewarding duties or tasks of an assistant principal? The themes representing the vast majority of participant responses indicated forming Relationships with Students (75%), having an Impact on Student (Academic, Social Emotional) Career (66%), and being an Instructional Leader (50%) were most rewarding.

The third interview question focused on the perceptions participants held toward the role of principal. I asked, What are the most important job requirements of the principalship? The themes with the greatest common responses indicated the most important job requirements of the principalship included Instructional Leadership (58%) to strengthen teaching and learning, having effective Communication (50%) skills and possessing Visionary Leadership (41%) attributes were expressed as essential requirements of a principal. Also identified was being able to be a Flexible Decision Maker (41%), dealing with Personnel Decisions (33%) and Managerial (25%) duties as important responsibilities of the principalship.

The participant responses in this study regarding how they perceive the role of the principalship are supported by current literature. Newton, Giesen, Freeman, Bishop, and Zeitoun conducted a study in 2003; they categorized a principal's responsibilities into two distinct roles, instructional leader and school manager. As an instructional leader, the role involves "monitoring instruction, guiding teachers, and planning professional development" (p. 508). As a school manager, the role involves "planning, coordination, control, and operation of the school" (p. 507). It has also been stated that

an instructional leader “focuses on strengthening teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making and accountability” (Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship, 2000, p. 4).

Also similar to the responses of participants in this study, Rallis and Goldring (2000) identified the following roles of the principals: Facilitator, Balancer, Flag Bearer and Bridger, Inquirer, Learner, and Leader. Rallis and Goldring’s Balancer role identifies a principal’s responsibility as “translator within the system. The principal is responsible for building relationships with the hierarchy, and the central office, which makes the decisions to support or not to support the ideas brought forth by the principal.” Within the Flag Bearer role, “The principal is responsible for communicating to the community as well as building a bridge for communication between the community and the school” and as an Inquirer, “The principal is responsible for asking questions about their school’s activities as well as examining the decisions she/he makes” (Rallis & Goldring, 2000).

Having a visionary leadership style is categorized as the ability to set the tone for the school, establish the climate of a school for students and staff and communicate and influence the faculty of the school towards a shared vision (Covey, 1990; Green, 2010, Rubin 2009). It has also been said that the principal has to demonstrate “energy, commitment, entrepreneurial spirit, values and conviction that all children will learn at high levels, as well as inspiring others with this vision both inside and outside the school building” (Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship, 2000, p. 4). According to the *2008 Educational School Policy Standards* (2008), a principal’s responsibility is “setting directions.” This is the area “educational leaders have the



greatest impact, as the goals and sense of purpose they provide strengthens the entire staff. Strong educational leaders also attract, retain, and get the most out of talented teachers” (ISLLC, 2008, p. 9).

When asked the fourth interview question, What are the most difficult duties or tasks of the principalship? many of the same themes emerged in relation to the most important job requirements of the principal. The vast majority of participants indicated that Time (41%), dealing with Difficult Parents (33%), Managerial (33%) duties, making Personnel Decisions (25%), the task of Communication (17%) and the principal’s Responsibilities (17%) were said to be some of the most difficult duties for principals.

The idea of time has also been documented in other research studies. In 2005 Buckingham, Donaldson and Marnik conducted “The Maine Principal Study.” Sixty two percent of the participating principals in this study indicated, “My workload makes it difficult to give my best attention to tasks.” Sixty nine percent indicated “I have little time left for myself.” “My job intrudes too much on my personal life” was indicated by 56%, and “I often wonder if the long hours involved in the job are worth it” was noted by 47%.

In Chapter I, I included findings from a study conducted by the University of Arkansas. This study surveyed teachers and superintendents to ascertain data to determine if there was a shortage of school leaders and if so, what were the causes. One of the top reasons for not pursuing the principalship were the demands of parents and community (The Status of School Leadership In Arkansas study, 2008).

To be an effective principal in the 21st century, it has been said that the tasks are much more than performing the needed managerial responsibilities. School principals

are now responsible for managerial tasks, a deep engagement in instruction and assessment, and an understanding of society issues (Whitaker, 2002). “The principal controls the most important factors that affect the quality of a school. These include the hiring; supervising and retaining of highly qualified teachers” (Harris, Rutledge, Ingle, & Thompson, 2006). As already stated in research question 1, interview question 3, Rallis and Goldring (2000) support that having strong communication skills are an essential task of the principalship.

Highlighting the difficult responsibilities of the principalship, Stephen Knobl conducted a study in 2010 on the perceptions of high school principals regarding their perceived roles, professional development, and their challenges and frustrations.

One participant in Knobl’s study expressed his frustrations of being a principal. There’s more emotional frustration...because the buck stops with you....Student achievement stops with you...in the age of accountability, it’s a very demanding position, it’s very complex, and it’s very political....The number one priority is increasing the graduation rate...closing the achievement gap, which is a nationwide issue. (p. 56)

Table # 15

## Research Question 2 Responses by Themes

Research Question One: How do the assistant principals perceive the role of the principal?		
Interview Question	Theme	Percentage of Participants who Indicated Theme
Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?	Drive-Motivation	66%
	Greater Impact	58%
	Guided	50%
	Financial Incentives	17%
Interview Question	Theme	
Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?	Relationships with Students	75%
	Impact on Student (Academic, Social Emotional) Career	66%
	Instructional Leadership	50%
Interview Question	Theme	
Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?	Instructional Leadership	58%
	Communication	50%
	Visionary Leadership	41%
	Flexible Decision Maker	41%
	Personnel Decisions	33%
	Managerial	25%
Interview Question	Theme	Interview Question
Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?	Time	41%
	Difficult Parents	33%
	Managerial	33%
	Personnel Decisions	25%
	Communication	17%
	Responsibility	17%

When asked interview question 5, What are the factors that motivate and inspire assistant principals to pursue employment as a principal?, The vast majority of participants indicated motivation to pursue a principalship could be contributed to

internal motivation assistant principal's possess to take the Next Step (58%) and assume greater responsibility. The perception that Positive Experiences as Assistant Principal (50%) associated with the school they work in and the principal they work with was also indicated by participants as having an impact on motivation to pursue a principalship. The motivation of having Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference (50%) to impact a school community were also attributed to influencing assistant principal's desire to pursue a principalship. Gaining Confidence (33%) and Financial Incentives (17%) were also indicated as motivation to pursue a principalship.

Taking the next step aligns with what has been previously stated in Chapter II, that the assistant principal is most commonly viewed as a stepping-stone to the principalship (Marshall, 1992; Schmidt, Kosmoski, & Pollack, 1998). This is based on the fact that the position is a sound training ground for the principalship (Wells, Scollay, & Rinehart, 1999).

Only two participants indicated that financial incentives were motivating factors for pursuing a principalship. Ten participants did not indicate that financial incentives were motivating factors that inspired assistant principals to pursue a principalship. This could have to do with what Cushing, Kerrins, and Johnstone (2003) found. They highlighted the perception of inadequate salary compensation for the principalship. They stated, "If salaries are calculated on an hourly or even daily basis, the discrepancy between teacher and principal salaries appears even greater—considering principals typically work longer school days, longer school weeks and longer school years" (p. 29). The majority of the participants in this study indicated that taking the next step, having a positive experience as an assistant principal, having leadership aspirations to make a

difference and gaining confidence were factors that motivate and inspire assistant principals to pursue employment as a principal.

When asked question 6, What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a principalship? the most common perceptions participants held included Time (58%) commitment of the job, assistant principals having a Lack of Confidence (50%) in their ability to assume the role of principal and the vast Responsibilities (50%) of the principalship. Several participants suggested that assistant principals could be Content Being Assistant Principal (25%). Dealing with Difficult Parents (17%) and being Further Removed from Students (17%) were also expressed as possible deterrents.

Similar to the themes that emerged in this study, Pounder and Merrill, 2001 indicated, “balancing the demands of job, and family... the extended work day required...extracurricular supervision had an impact on assistant principal’s decision to pursue a career in the principalship” (para. 10). Comparably, DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran’s 2003 study found that principals feel their most satisfying duties are being replaced by having to perform duties that are less satisfying. The participants identified lacking both time and personnel to perform expectations of an instructional leader (66%). It was reported that they did not receive enough administrative support (47%) and a high percentage reported working 50-hours per week (84%).

A research study conducted by Stephen Knobl (2010) also indicated time as being a major deterrent for pursuing a principalship. One participant in his research study said,

I didn't realize how much you lose your life until I became a high school principal...not...the healthiest lifestyle in the world. If you truly are in it to see your school improve and your kids learning...it's a 15 or 16-hr a day job. We're moving away from principal as a manager and more towards the principal as the instructional leader. It truly consumes you. (p. 58)

Finally, when asked the seventh interview question, *Are you interested in pursuing a principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a principalship*, 10 participants (83%) indicated they were interested in pursuing a principalship. Assistant principals learning on the job and Growing as an Administrator (58%) and Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference (33%) in classroom instruction and student learning were identified as motivating factors. Gaining Confidence (25%) in their ability to perform the duties of a principal was also indicated as motivation to pursue a principalship.

One participant indicated she was not interested in pursuing a principalship because she felt the principalship was farther removed from curriculum and instruction and she had aspirations of pursuing a central office position (Less Curriculum and Instruction .08%). One participant indicated she did not currently have aspirations to advance to principal because she liked her role as assistant principal and felt she had more to learn (Content Being Assistant Principal .08%), but she did not rule out the possibility of pursuing a principalship in the future. This finding is similar the findings of Singletary-Dixon's 2011 study. Sixty nine percent of her participants expressed satisfaction with their career and did not intend to pursue a principalship.

There is an abundance of literature expressing concerns of reluctant principal candidates resulting in a principal shortage (Bass, 2006; Dipaola, Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Macbeath, 2006; Whitaker, 2001). As provided in Chapter I, the authors of the 2000 report on *Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship* stated, “Many people believe that a scarcity of capable education leaders ranks among the most severe of the problems” (p. 1). In Chapter I, I provided a quote from Gene Bottoms the Senior Vice President of the Southern Regional Education Board. He said,

Each year, one-fifth of the principals in our nation’s public schools leave their jobs. Their departure creates more than 18,000 vacancies at the critical core of our K-12 education enterprise: school-level leadership. Anyone with a basic understanding of how schools function today knows that these vacant positions must be filled without delay. But who is next? Who will ensure that each of these 18,000 schools moves toward higher levels of performance? And where will school districts find these people? (2011, p. i)

I believe that school districts must focus on mentoring their assistant principals to assume vacancies that occur as principals retire. In order to do this, current principals have the additional responsibility of providing assistant principals with experiences to grow as administrators and gain confidence in order to assume the role of principal. Current principals must provide experiences focused on developing instructional leadership qualities focused on making a difference.

Literature has been provided throughout this dissertation explaining deterrents perceived by assistant principals for not pursuing a principalship. Alan Richard (2000), the author of the article, “Toughest Job in Education?” provides several assistant

principals' attitudes toward their jobs and career aspirations. As a result of the increasing demands of the position, these assistant principals indicated they would not want to apply for a role as principal. In 2000, Kennedy conducted a study of 90 principals at a Principals Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. He identified reasons why fewer individuals seek to become principals. These included, "the changing demands of the job; salary; time; lack of parent and community support and the media and public toward schools; and lack of respect" (Kennedy, 2000). In a study with similar findings, MacBeath (2006) labeled the issue of attracting quality candidates as the "war for talent." He summarized eight factors that erode talent, energy, and creativity, which lead to burnout and reluctance to pursue a principalship. These factors are, stress (changing nature of the job, the burden of success or failure of school, test scores, lack of control), workload (administrative tasks, extra responsibilities), accountability and bureaucracy (paperwork, feeling of not being in control, blame and shame), personal and domestic concerns (lifestyle, incentives and disincentives of the job), salary (lower pay per hour than teaching staff), social factors (needs, attitudes, motivations of students), and teacher supply line (teacher recruitment). These concerns exist, but the findings of my research study do not support a lack of assistant principals aspiring toward obtaining a principalship.



Table # 16

## Research Question 2 Responses by Themes

**Research Question 2: What are the factors that influence assistant principals to seek or not to seek a position as school principal?**

Interview Question	Theme	Percentage of Participants who Indicated Theme
Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?	Next Step	58%
	Positive Experience as Assistant Principal	50%
	Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference	50%
	Gaining Confidence	33%
	Financial Incentives	17%
Interview Question	Theme	
Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?	Time	58%
	Lack of Confidence	50%
	Responsibility	50%
	Content Being Assistant Principal	25%
	Difficult Parents	17%
	Further Removed From Students	17%
Interview Question	Theme	Interview Question
Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?	Motivations	
	Growing as an Administrator	58%
	Leadership Aspirations to Make a Difference	33%
	Gaining Confidence	25%
	<b>Deterrents</b>	
	Content Being Assistant Principal	.08%
	Less Curriculum & Instruction	.08%

The findings of this research study indicate that 83% of the participants did aspire to pursue a principalship. The participants in this study identified the common factors associated with the negative perception of the principalship, which are evident throughout current research, but the vast majority held a desire to further their career and pursue a principalship. Current literature indicates the lack of financial compensation as a deterring factor for assistant principals to pursue a principalship. This study found that 100% of the participants did not indicate lack of financial as a deterring factor. In fact, 17% indicated financial compensation as a motivating factor.

The participants in this study, like myself, perceive the role of principal as demanding, but still aspire to fulfill internal drive and motivation to perform the role of principal. The principalship was described as being a difficult job due to time requirements and responsibilities of dealing with difficult parents, personnel decisions, politics and discipline, while keeping constant communication and managing the day-to-day operations. Taking the next step, having positive experiences as an assistant principal, having leadership aspirations to make a difference, financial incentives and growing as an administrator were described as motivating factors for pursuing a principalship.

### **Recommendations**

This section offers recommendations resulting from the data findings of this research study:

#### **Practice Recommendations**

The following list provides recommendations for education practice.

1. As it has been stated throughout this dissertation, a principal is now much more than a building manager. It is the responsibility of principals who are mentoring assistant principals to provide them with experiences to develop instructional leadership qualities that focus on strengthening teaching, learning and student achievement.
2. As it was described in this research study, principals have an important duty of guiding strong teachers (educational leaders) into administrative positions. School districts should take advantage of “home growing” their future administrative teams with natural teacher leaders. It is recommended that school districts establish teacher/administrative internships to encourage and support teachers interested in pursuing administration in order expose them to administrative responsibilities.
3. It is recommended that universities and colleges join forces with school districts to provide mentoring programs for new administrators in order to keep newly appointed administrators abreast of current trends in education. Education cannot truly grow if only relations within a school district one works are utilized.
4. It is recommended school districts create consortiums with other districts consisting of veteran building administrators and new assistant principals to further provide an array of opportunities to be mentored by other veteran administrators.

## **Policy Recommendations**

The following list provides recommendations for education policy.

1. School districts should establish a policy to develop a mentoring program facilitated by the superintendent and assistant superintendent for new assistant principals. Being a new building administrator can be isolating and overwhelming. This mentoring program would provide new administrators opportunities of being mentored by more than just the principal. It would also provide the district an opportunity to get to know and evaluate new assistant principals.

## **Research Recommendations**

The following research topics are suggested for educational researchers to pursue.

1. Due to the finding that 91.6% of the assistant principals who took the initiative to participate in this educational research study were from one of the top three DFG classification in New Jersey, it is recommended that a research study be done to analyze and compare school district philosophy based on DFG.
2. In this research study the experiences assistant principals have were indicated as impacting motivations for career advancement. It is recommended that a large-scale quantitative study be done to describe the impact of experiences and how they effect on assistant principals' aspirations to pursue a principalship. This would further add to the debate over the negative perceptions of the principalship and help determine specific areas that might be causing assistant principals' reluctance to aspire to a principalship.

3. This research study did not focus on gender or age. It is recommended a qualitative research study be conducted to determine whether gender or age impacts assistant principals' aspirations for career advancement.
5. It is also recommended that research be conducted to obtain data on the amount of years in an assistant principalship, perceptions of the principalship and aspirations for advancing to principal.
6. It has been stated that, "Policymakers do not pay attention to the assistant principal. They do not sponsor studies or even collect data on this position. As a result, they miss rich opportunities to make a difference" (Marshall, 2006, p.?). With the current national focus on accountability, it is recommended that State Departments of Education look to further conduct research studies on training opportunities and evaluations for newly appointed assistant principals. This should be done because the assistant principalship is the stepping stone toward the principalship.

### **Conclusions**

The national spotlight is on education and has been for a long time. With the high stakes revolving around international competitiveness, we are faced with impending accountability measures that will link teacher and principal evaluations to student performance. This further increases the responsibility of supervising and monitoring classroom instruction to ensure student success. To deal with these mandates, strong educational leaders are needed who embrace a vision without being deterred by new and ever-changing initiatives. The theorist Peter Vaill (2009) used the metaphor, "Permanent White Water" to describe management. One can think of the principalship as the

“performing art of navigating through constant white water due to rapid change in our culture and environment” (p. 20). He states, in “permanent white water, one cannot know where the next opportunity or threat is going to come from. Yet when it comes, a great deal depends on possessing or being able to rapidly acquire a useful way of thinking about it, so that courses of action one had under way will not be shattered” (Vaill, 2009, p. 20). The course of action has remained the same; we are in the field of educating the future. The principalship may be more cumbersome than in the past, but issues always seemed to be easier yesterday. The conceptual framework for this study identified the perception one holds as his/her reality. No matter if the job is more difficult today than yesterday, or not. The reality is, we must attract and cultivate the best minds that possess strong instructional leadership qualities. The pursuit of a principalship is undoubtedly a demanding career choice, but a noble one. As an assistant principal, I am interested in pursuing the next step in my career. The reason for this is the same reason I became a teacher; I know I can make a difference in the lives of the teachers, students and families I serve.

## References

- Bass, T. (2006) To be or not to be: Issues influencing educators' decisions to enter the principalship. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, 2(4) 19-30. Retrieved from [http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/AASA\\_Journal\\_of\\_Scholarship\\_and\\_Practice/Winter2006FINAL.pdf](http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/AASA_Journal_of_Scholarship_and_Practice/Winter2006FINAL.pdf)
- Bowles, B. D. (1990). The silent crisis in education leadership. *Education Digest*, 53, 12-14.
- Buckingham, D., Donaldson, G., & Marnik, G. (2005). The Maine Principal Study: Change and Stability in School Leadership: 1992-2005. Orono, ME: University of Maine.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010). Occupational outlook andbook, 2010-2011. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/home.htm>
- Carnine, L., Denny, G., Hewitt, P., & Pijanowsky, (May 2008). The Status of School Leadership in Arkansas. Fayetteville, AR: Research Advocacy Network.
- Copland, M. (2001). The Myth of the Superprincipal. *Phi Delta Kappan*; Mar 2001; 82(7) 528-533.
- Cooley, V., Shen, J. (2003). School accountability and professional job. responsibilities: A perspective from secondary principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, 87(634), 10-25.
- Covey, S., (1990). *Principal centered leadership*. New York, New York: Davison of Simon & Schuster.

- Cranston, N., Tromans, C., & Reugebrink, M. (2004). Forgotten leaders: What do we know about the deputy principalship in secondary schools? *International Journal of Leadership in education*, 7(3), 225-242.
- Cushing, K.S., Kerrins, J. A., & Johnstone, T. (2003 May/June). Disappearing principals. *Leadership* 32(5), 28-29, 37.
- Davis, S. H. (2005). School leadership study: Developing successful principals. Stanford, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute. Retrieved from [http://seli.stanford.edu/research/documents/SELI\\_sls\\_research\\_review.pdf](http://seli.stanford.edu/research/documents/SELI_sls_research_review.pdf)
- Davis, J., Bottoms, G., (2011) Who's Next? Let's Stop Gambling on School Performance and Plan for Principal Succession Publication No: 11V19
- DiPaola, M. F., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003, March). The principalship at a crossroads: A study of the condition and concerns of principals. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin* (87), 43-67.
- Singletary-Dixon, S. (2011) *Critical Partners: Analysis of Assistant Principals' Perceptions of their Relationships and Preparedness for the Principalship*. Dissertation, Fordham University, New York
- Dunleavy, C. (2011) *Mobility of assistant principals: Examining their roles, accomplishments, and aspirations* Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT)
- Marchetti, N. (2004) *An examination of selected job factors that influence New York State high school assistant principal Intentions to Apply for and Accept High School Principal Positions* Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT)



- Gajda, R. & Militello, M. (2008). Recruiting and retaining school principals: What we can learn from practicing administrators. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, (5) 2, 14-20.
- Gaziel, H. (2003). Images of leadership and their effect upon school principal performance. *International Review of Education*, 49(5), 475-486.
- Giorgi, A. (1985) *Phenomenology and Psychological Research*. Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press. 5(1), 14-20
- Glanz, J. (1994) Dilemmas of assistant principals in their supervisory role: Reflections of an assistant principal. *Journal of School Leadership*, 4(5), 577-590.
- Green, R. L. 2010. *The four dimensions of principal leadership: A framework for Leading 21st-century schools*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Hancock, D., & Bird, J. (2008). Motivators and inhibitors to becoming a school leader. Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York.
- Harris, D. N., Rutledge, S.A., Ingle, W.K. & Thompson. C.C.. (2006, April). *Mix and match: What principals look for when hiring teachers and implications for teacher quality policies*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, San Francisco.
- Harris, J. (2011) *An Investigation of the Factors Influencing West Virginia Educators' Decisions to Pursue the Principalship*, Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT)
- Hartzell, G. N. (1993). The assistant principal: Neglected actor in practitioner leadership literature. *Journal of School Leadership*, 3(6), 707-723.
- Hertling. E. (2001). *Retaining principals*. Retrieved from Eric database. (ED454567)

- Howley, A., Andrianaivo, S., & Perry, J. (2005). The pain outweighs the gain: Why teachers don't want to become principals. *Teachers College Record*, 107(4), 757-782.
- Institute for Educational Leadership. (2000). Leadership for student learning: Reinventing the principalship. A Report of the task force on the Principalship. Washington, D.C. Author. Retrieved from <http://www.iel.org/programs/21st/reports/principal.pdf>
- Kennedy, C. 2000. Summary of responses to NAESP/NASSP/NMSA survey questions. Washinton, D.C.: Principals' Leadership Summit.
- Knobl, S. (2010) *Perceptions of the Roles, Professional Development, Challenges, and Frustrations of High School Principals* College of Education Dissertation University of South Florida
- Krueger, R. Casey, M. (2000). *Focus groups (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.): A practical guide For applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Krueger, R., & Casey, M. Website Retrieved from <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/about.html>
- Lacey, K., (2003). Principal class leadership aspirations A research report to Education Victoria. Melbourne: Rightangle consulting.
- Lambert, L., Walker, D ., Zimmerman, D ., Cooper, J ., Lambert, M ., Gardner, M ., et al. (2002). *The constructivist leaders* (2nd ed .). New York: Teachers College Press.
- New Jersey Leaders To Leaders Website: (<http://www.njl2l.org>).

- Lester, S (1999) 'An introduction to phenomenological research,' Taunton UK, Stan Lester Developments. Retrieved from <http://www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf>
- Leithwood, K, Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, E. (2004). *How leadership Influences student learning*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation
- Marshall, C. (2006). The Assistant Principal: Leadership Choices and Challenges. Retrieved from ERIC Database ED342086
- Marshall, C. Mitchell, B., and Gross, R. (1990, April). A typology of the assistant principalship: A model of orientation to the administrative career, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, Boston, MA.
- Marshall, C. (1992). *The assistant principal: Leadership choices and challenges*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin.
- Marzano, R.J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B.A. (2005). *School leadership that works. From research to results*. Alexandria, V.A.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- McAdams, R. P. (1998). Who'll run the schools? The coming administrator shortage. *The American School Board Journal*, 185(8), 37-39.
- MacBeath, J. (2006). The talent enigma. *International Journal of Leadership in education*, 9 (3), 183-204.
- Merriam, S.B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.

- Mertz, N., & McNeely, S. R. (1999, April). *Through the looking glass: An upfront and personal look at the world of the assistant principal*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Mitgang, L., (2003). Beyond the pipeline: Getting the principals we Need, where are they needed most. City, state: The Wallace Foundation
- NCLB Available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>
- New Translation: "Phenomenology of Perception" trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012). Phenomenology of Perception trans. by Colin Smith, (New York: Humanities Press, 1962) and (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) translation revised by Forrest Williams, 1981; reprinted, 2002)
- Newton, R., Giesen, J., Freeman, J., Bishop, H., & Zietoun, P. (2003). Assessing the reactions of males and females to attributes of the principalship. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(4), 504-532.
- Oliver, R. (2003). Assistant principal job satisfaction and the desire to become principals. *NCPEA Education Leadership Review*, 4,38-46
- Oliver, R. (2001). Desire for the next level: Orange County, California, co-administrators perceptions. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 13, 99-109
- Papa, F. & Baxter, I. A. (2005). Dispelling the Myths and Confirming the Truths of the Imminent Shortage of Principals: The Case of New York State. *Planning and Changing* ProQuest Educational Journals v36 n3-4 p217-234

- Pounder, D. & Merrill, R. (2001). Lost Luster Redesigning the principalship could have a positive impact on the pipeline supply. Retrieved 9/23/12 from <http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=10668>
- Pounder, D.G., & Merrill, R.J., (2001). Job desirability of the high school principalship: A job choice theory perspective. *Educational Administrative Quarterly*, 37 (1), 27-57.
- Pounder, D., & Merrill, R. (2001). Lost luster. *School Administrator*, 58, 18. Retrieved September 24, 2006, from <http://questia.com>
- Rallis, S. & Goldring, E. (2000). *Principals of dynamic schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Reed, D. B., & Connors, D. A. (1982). The vice principalship in urban high schools: A field study. *Urban Education*, 40, 465-481.
- Richard, A. (2000). Toughest job in education? *Education Week*, 19(31), p. 44.
- Richard, Alan. "Panel Calls for Fresh Look at Duties Facing Principals." *Education Week* (November 1, 2000): 1-5. [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)
- Rubin, H., (2009). *Collaborative leadership: Developing effective partnerships for communities and schools* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Company.
- Schmidt, L. J., Kosmoski, G. J., & Pollack, D. R. (1998). Novice administrators: Psychological and physiological effects. Reston, VA: Educational Resource Information Center. Retrieved from ERICdatabase. (ED427386)

- Shelton, T.D., and Munnich, L.W. (2011). Administrative autumn: A study of Minnesota's aging educational leadership and the difficulty in finding their replacements, Executive summary. Roseville, Minn.: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.
- John R. Taylor, 2007, Job Satisfaction Among High School Assistant Principals in Seven Florida Counties, University of South Florida
- Tripken, P. M. (2006). *The assistant principalship: Becoming a school administrator*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Fordham University, New York, NY.
- U.S. Department of Education, The National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, April 1983. Available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>
- Vaill. P. Managing As A Performing Art New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991
- Wells, Z., Scollay, S. J., & Rinehart, J. S. (1999, November). A comparison of job responsibilities of Kentucky's 1997-98 induction year intern principals and assistant principals. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Point Clear, AL.
- Whitaker, K. (2001). Where are the principal candidates? Perceptions of superintendents. NASSP Bulletin, 85 (625), 82-92
- Whitaker, K. . (2002). Principal role changes and influence on principal recruitment and selection: An international perspective. Journal of Educational Administration, 41(1), 37-54
- Wiseman, A. (2005). *Principals under pressure*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Young, M. D., Petersen, G. J., & Short, P. M. (2002). The complexity of substantive reform: A call for interdependence among key stakeholders. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38, 137-175.

## **Appendix A**

### **Focus Group and Interview Script and Questions**



### **Oliver Focus Group Script**

Utilized the Richard A. Krueger Website as a resource to write script.

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus.html>

### **Welcome**

Good evening and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking the time to join us to talk about the perceptions assistant principals hold toward the principalship. My name is James Oliver and I am a Doctoral student at Seton Hall University. This session is part of my dissertation study. The two areas of focus are on the perceptions assistant principals hold toward the principalship and the motivations that inspire or deter assistant principals from applying for a principalship. I am having discussions like this with several groups of assistant principals.

You were invited because all of you are assistant principals in their second year of the Leaders to Leaders program working in New Jersey. As assistant principals you are familiar with the job responsibilities of the principalship. I divided the DFG of NJ into three categories and selected 6 assistant principals from each category. This is the \_\_\_\_\_ category, which consist of \_\_\_\_\_.

This session will be recorded because I do not want to miss any of your comments. During these sessions people often say very helpful things and I can't write fast enough to get them all down. We will be on a first name basis tonight, and I want you to be assured, I will not use any names in the reports. You have complete confidentiality.

Be assured, there are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that we are just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

### **Some Guidelines for today's session**

- No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view
- We're tape recording, so please allow only one person to speak at a time
- We're on a first name basis
- You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views
- I ask that your turn off your phones. If you cannot and if you must respond to a call please do so as quietly as possible and re-join us as quickly as you can.
- My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion

Well, let's begin. We've placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the table. Tell us your name and where you live.

### **Interview Questions:**

1. Why did you become an administrator?

2. What are the most rewording duties/tasks of an assistant principal?
3. What are the most important job requirements of a principal?
4. What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?
5. What are the factors that motivate and inspire assistant principals to pursue employment as a Principal?
6. What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a principalship?
7. Are you interested in pursuing a principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a principalship?

**Follow-Up Questions:**

1. Have we missed anything?
2. Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Transcriptions**

**Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

**1A:** It felt like the next logical step after teaching. I was ready for something more challenging. It felt almost natural.

**2A:** I would say, I was able to work in a leadership role with the department of education and I really felt that was a really rewarding experience and I have always felt the importance of professional development in the world of education and this gives me another avenue to move forward with that goal.

**3A:** I had a corporate background in the first 16 years of my working life. Then I became a teacher in the same district. Then, during my teaching role, I became involved in the association. So I was involved with dealing with many supervisors and administrators helping the teacher is sometimes a difficult situation and I realized that the administrators were there basically, the administrators were there to help and so I saw both sides and I learned a little bit from each of those administrators of what I liked and didn't. And I taught for 13 years, 14 years, I said I am ready to help on the other side so, I said ok, let me see if I can take the leadership role in a school

**B1: Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

I used to be an administrator for a township in a recreation department and I decided I wanted to get back into teaching so I had been in \_\_\_\_\_

school district for about seven years and the opportunity came up for me to pursue my masters. Um, I always had leadership responsibilities in the school when I was a teacher. I served on a leadership team. Um, I was part of the I&RS team. I loved teaching, but I also liked being on the administrative end and \_\_\_\_\_ school district decided that they were going to choose employees to send for their masters in educational administration. When I applied, I was accepted so \_\_\_\_\_ school district paid for my masters. So I think, the place where I was in my life at the time it was an opportunity that I took because from an administrative standpoint view as far as making changes. Um, I think you can have an impact on what's going on at the school and on a district level and I think that was the way that things just worked out um for me personally. Um, it is something that I didn't ever really aspire to do but um, but then the opportunity presented itself, I am very happy that I did this.

**B2: Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

I knew I wanted more than just teaching and honestly the opening was in the school where I was teaching and it seemed like a time to just give it a try. At the time I was finishing grad school, so I was sort of encouraged to apply by a colleague and the assistant principal that was there was leaving who I had worked very closely with. In the school, I was a literacy coach so I kind of had half a foot sort of as a different role than a teacher. Then the opening just came, and honestly, I was thinking that there were some

pretty good things that I was doing in my classroom and I thought I could implement them school wide level. I was kind of ready to take the next step.

**B3: Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

I have always kind of been a leader throughout high school and college and I really enjoyed being a teacher, but I thought that getting into administration would give me an opportunity to be a leader. Not only with the students in my class, but also for the faculty and staff of the building. Um, it would also give me the opportunity to get to know more people, foster more relationships with the parents as well as other school officials and the rest of the student body. As opposed to the 150 kids I might have had in classes you know now, I am in charge of 1,500 kids. So it has actually given me the opportunity to get to know more people, and I always felt like I had something to offer for the students as far as the experiences I have had. And again, working to be a leader and trying to create or improve opportunities for our kids, that is what I was looking for.

**B4: Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

Um, I actually became an administrator; I was a special ed teacher prior to being an administrator. Um, when I went back to school I was actually starting a master's in special education and realized I wanted something

more than that. Um, I went to the college of \_\_\_\_\_ and ended up looking at other programs they had available and when I enrolled in the master of educational leadership, I loved the first class and went through a two-year cohort. Just kind of wanted something more, other options outside of the classroom. I loved being a teacher, but knew someday maybe I would want something more than that.

**Moderator:** Can you go into what that more is?

I think that you know, I held that certificate for special education and elementary education so when I went back to look for what I wanted to do my masters in knowing that if I got a masters in special education it wouldn't give me any more options to move up in the education field. I would still just be a special education teacher. Um, and I wanted to have other options to move up in my career

**B5: Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

I became an administrator because, well quite honestly, initially I didn't see myself, um, as a career um classroom teacher. I felt that I am the type of person that likes change. I like frequent change and when I am in something too long I am a person that becomes bored and begins to become stagnant. So when I became an educator, I had aspirations of getting into some type of administration, supervision within about a ten-

year period. So it happened year thirteen for me, so at that time in my teaching career, I felt myself going through the motions. I was frequently challenging myself and getting as much professional development as I could, but I just craved change and thought that I could take some of my assists from teaching and coaching experiences and attempt to lead a building or be a co-leader of a building instead of managing a small group of students or athletes. I wanted the challenge of managing a whole school and then quite honestly the second if not the first reason is for career advancement and pay um, I felt that I had the tools to be a successful school leader and to help manage people, but I also wanted to move up the chain and move up the ladder and make more money to provide for my family.

**C1: Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

Um, my goal in administration is to go into curriculum and instruction at some point. So I started out being a department chair of mathematics at a high school level and then moved up into the assistant principalship and my thought was in curriculum and instruction. I wouldn't just be impacting the students that I would be instructing in a classroom, I would be impacting district level students on a more global scale so that was my hope. My hope was to be able to, in looking at curriculum and instruction be able to infuse more culturally sensitive content for younger folk. So, that has been my underlying mission in my twelve years in education.



**C2: Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

As a teacher towards the latter part of my career, I had an urge to become a team leader. I was a sixth grade middle school teacher. Um, I was welcomed into that position by my administrators and I was also welcomed into that position by my colleagues. There was something about me that enjoyed the administrative side of what I was doing, but of course, I loved the classroom. Nothing, in fact have loved more than the classroom so far, but so I guess there was an urge to go into administration because both I was being encouraged to and there was something internal and intrinsic that made me want to do it.

**Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

C3: I think why I became an administrator, it was interesting um the district that I taught in was very generous with graduate school so I got my first masters in something very general and I wanted to get a second one because it was covered and I decided on administration. I really wasn't thoughtful about administration um but then during that time period I think I was kind of selected by the administration to start doing things around the building. I was asked to apply for a department head position, which was really kind of nice. I was sort of coaxed that way um but I was very hesitant to go into an assistant principalship because I really liked teaching. I like the contact with the kids, so I was hesitant to

jump at first but um but I think it was more of the financial incentives of going back to school for me.

**Question 1: Why did you become an administrator?**

**C4:** I became, I got into education because of enjoying um working with students. I enjoyed coaching and teaching was kind of a way that I could teach and coach and work with students at that level. Um I got my masters degree and through that program started to look more closely at administration around me and realized, hey, this is something that I can do, something I would be interested in. It allowed me to work more closely with individual students, so rather than working with you know 25 kids in a class, you know five periods a day it allowed me to work more closely with specific students

**Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?**

**A2:** To me, the most rewarding part is that I always go back to the kids. Unfortunately, you get stuck in the lunchroom doing the discipline part which to me isn't really rewarding. I guess just being around the kids and seeing how they react with one another, but also having an influence of how relationships are put together. Then working with the teachers to help them improve their instruction so that they are improving the students' life long education.

**A3:** One of the rewarding things is that we have a character education program where I get to meet with the kids who are caught doing something good so I, I, I, the PR part of that job is, I actually meet with the good kids. They change the concept of what it is like to come to the front office. I communicate in a positive fashion with their parents so you look good to the parents. Another rewarding part is because I was a teacher within the school, so I know the inside culture of the school. I'm able to help the teachers, give advice on how things could, a different perspective on how things could be approached. So, helping the teachers and them appreciating. It's a head-trip, they appreciate what I do and that's a rewarding part of the job for me

**A1:** I would have to agree, having relationships with the students is very rewarding. I enjoy that a great deal, but I also find that working with the teachers umm and helping them to improve their instruction to be something that I really enjoy as well. When I've worked with teachers and we talk about things they can try and when they change things or come up with new things based on our discussion, I really love that, I find that really rewarding.

**B1: Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?**

The most rewarding, I enjoy the time that I spend with individual students. I wish that I, I know that certain students I have had an impact on, I wish that I can do more of that. Meeting with students. When I meet with students regardless of what the situation is, I try to get a full picture of what is going on. I usually pull up their grades, I look at their attendance um and I get to know that student and establish that relationship with the student. So I think establishing connections with the students and having some kind of impact on their education and opening up trying to make them realize that their education, the importance of their education as far as the opportunity for them to pursue whatever it is that they want to do in life. Um, the other thing that I enjoy doing is, I like to do scheduling, I like to do problem solving. When something comes up, I like to come up with solutions by collaborating with teachers or coaches or the special ed department. Um, I like managing the day to day, the little things for people, being a resource and a support for the staff so that their needs can be met. Um, you know being a service to them and I think that the teachers appreciate that something that may seem minor when you tend to those little things whether it be they need a flag in their classroom or their pencil sharpener is broken or their key is not working. Um, I get satisfaction because I feel I think, I'm appreciated by the teachers.

**B2: Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant**

**Principal?**

For me, I'm fortunate. I am in a role where I make a lot of curriculum decisions. I am sort of passionate about, um that sort of being in this role sort of allows me to make you know key decisions that effect Kindergarten through third grade instruction and the teaching and learning that goes on. Um it allows me to sort of broaden my relations with families and parents, which I think is key and kind of just make a special connection with more kids than just opposed to the kids in my classroom. I enjoy teaching teachers. I think teachers are the most important part of this whole process. So I enjoy working with um you know teachers and giving them strategies and um sharing ideas with them.

**B3: Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant**

**Principal?**

It's funny, most of my job deals with disciplinary issues, but we have also recently created a student recognition system here, where we have done that, that has been pretty rewarding. Um, also in dealing with some situations we had some kids who behaviors over the past year changes really have taken a turn for the better based on some of the things that we have kind of instituted. Whether it is working with CST to create

behavior plans or working closely with parents to help the family develop some type of a plan within the household. You know, kind of just being there showing that you care for the kids and seeing the light go on and them having maybe create more self-respect within a particular kid.

**Moderator:** So you would say that discipline is the most rewarding because of those things that you described, you get to be there and you can really make a difference?

**B3:** It doesn't always go that way. One time out of twenty maybe, but those are some of the rewarding things. For me, every day I am the big fat Meany, but I have been able, fortunate enough to make pretty good relationships with a lot of the kids in the school and they trust me and um, they are willing to come to me with any issues they have. To me, that is also rewarding because the fact that I have been able to establish something that probably hasn't existed with some of the students and administration before. The trust factor where they can come and we have been able to avoid a lot of fights, a lot of other things could happen because kids hear about it they know I am going to do what is right for the kids. So, it comes to hey Mr. \_\_\_ this kind of stuff is going on, I'm worried about my friend whatever it may be and you know. So I will jump into action to make sure that anything that could have happened is avoided. I work with the parents whoever they might be so that's kind of rewarding too. I, you know, a lot of times, not a lot of times, some of the

times it is a disciplinary thing where you see a kid recognize the mistakes they have may have made in the past and move on and become better people. It's the fact that the kids do trust me. They are willing to come to me. They are willing to talk to me about issues and concerns they have. I never thought that in this position I would become a couples therapist but I have become pretty good at that too, you know.

**B4: Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant**

**Principal?**

Rewarding, I am taking rewarding as what part of the job that I feel I enjoy is still working with the kids so closely. Um, it's a really nice balance in yes you are out of the classroom, which is a very scary jump to take, but I deal with kids all day and yes I do discipline but you are also being pro-active with kids that may be at-risk, different behaviors. So my day, the best parts of my day are with the kids. Whether it's the good stuff, the kids that are having a difficult time, an academic, the top 20 kids in the class. Being with the kids for me is the most rewarding part. And I like that we are administrators, but we are still dealing with kids all day.

**B5: Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant**

**Principal?**

Um, just that every day contact with the kids. I do very much like working with my teachers and I have you know about 35 teachers that I have been assigned to that I work individually with. We have about 70 teachers in the school, so I have half of them, so I like working with them and helping them meet the students needs and getting into the classrooms to see what's going on in the classroom. But, just one of the most, if not the most satisfying aspect is the interactions with the kids and communicating with kids trying to help them make better decisions. Whether it be a disciplinary problem or something going on in the classroom, I like to try and pass on some of my life experiences with them and help them make better decisions and talk to them whether it is things going on at home or school. That's where I get the most satisfaction where you know I can leave my office each day and even if it is only one kid for that day even if I help that kid grow in some way, you have a personal feeling of self worth that you are doing something that is good for kids

**C1: Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?**

I think probably the most rewarding is when you work with a young person and you are able to adjust their behavior. I have come to appreciate when I have the opportunity to work with a young person who may not at first may not have seen value in learning then realizes that



learning is something intrinsically human and that not only human, but also they can do it and that they start to learn in school not to just get grades, which is a small part in the process but, um learning to better themselves, learn to better their minds and expand the genomes. You know in their brains, um hopefully improve their life as they move through the system and so that has been rewarding in this work.

**C2: Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?**

Helping a student through a difficult time and having that student in some way relay to me that something that I have said or done has helped him or her. Um, helping a parent through something, um whether it be a difficult time or a good time or just celebrating the trials and tribulation of the waters of middle school. Um, but I also greatly enjoy coaching teachers and helping them. Slowly, I am becoming a resource for teachers as it comes to instruction and that is quite rewarding. And lastly, just knowing that as a leader in the building I am putting my spin and my vision on things has it's own rewards. You know seeing something that you planned or thought of you know maybe you planted a seed and people jumped on the idea and you watch your ideas flourish, that is also something that I enjoy.

**Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?**

**C3:** Their maturity and growth and especially when you see them struggling and making poor decisions and then seeing them grow into caring individuals or leading a club or an activity or being part of a sports team when they were kind of loaners when they were at the beginning of their careers. I think that just that gradual maturity that we are able to see from where we sit and um, I would also go as far to say when we have the siblings of the kids how you connect with those families and see them at sporting events eight years later and now the little one is part of our family here I think that is just the neatest things.

**Question 2: What are the most rewarding duties/tasks of an Assistant Principal?**

**C4:** I think the most rewarding is really taking those kids who are struggling along the way and trying to help them to be successful. Most of the kids in a school are going to be successful and it's those students who are really struggling that you sort of get to know them, get to know their families um learn about their problems and you know how to help them become successful, you know along that four year journey so.

**Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

**A3:** The important requirements of a principal I fell is that of a supporting role to support the teachers, the students, and support the assistant principals. To focus in on the, to make the school run as a whole and not

for just a small group of people. So if you are looking at it as a global, all 1,500 students, what's in the best interest of all of them together, as opposed to if one assistant principal has this particular grade or particular team they might have a less, a smaller focus where the principal's job is one of the most important job requirements is to be an open decision maker for the entire building globally. I mean without the specifics of what, but that to means, keep your eye on the bigger prize the bigger goal.

**A2:** Agreeing with AB's answer, I really think that a big goal for a principal is to have a vision and to see how all the pieces or components between the students, the staff, the community, how they relate to one another. I think you have to keep a balance of having interpersonal relationships with each person as well as having a good managerial style umm knowing where people's strengths and then areas of support are and then helping them to move forward to improve themselves, thereby improving the institution as a whole.

**A1:** I agree with that as well, I think that interpersonal skills are really vital to be able to be a successful principal because you really are balancing personalities in staff and teachers and students and families and the community. You need to know how to really be flexible, understand different kinds of people and work with them umm to make everything

kind of come together because it is a big puzzle and you have to make sure the pieces kind of fit.

**B1: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

The most important, there are so many answers to that question because I think one of the most important things is to retain and support your staff that are doing a great job and the way the tenure system is right now, when you're, um doing your observations of your non-tenured staff, you want to try and support them and try and make decisions as to whether they should be retained or not. I believe that it is important because the strongest influence on the students is what's going on in the classroom. Along with that, supporting the teachers providing them PD. Allowing them the time and resources that they need to teach well, which is something I don't think that we, we have a difficult time managing that. Um, that those, that is what I feel is important.

**B2: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

Um, I think, um overall the principal sets the tone for the whole building. So that it kind of starts with them in terms of, you know the message they are sending. It sets expectations about kids, expectations about learning and the kind of things that are going to happen in the classroom in terms of um instruction, in terms of the social and emotional growth. Also in terms of resources and how we are using resources. For example, our

financial resources and sort of our personnel resources and to make the decisions of who we should put where, things like that.

**B3: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

I think being able to delegate responsibilities is extremely important, you know we have approximately 1,500 kids at our school and I know our principal is able to rest easier knowing that the assistant principal in charge of a particular area or the supervisors in charge of their areas are going to do what is necessary to make the successful school. You know, make the school successful from their standpoint.

Um, organization, the ability to communicate, those are some of the key issues, the most important things you need to have because I look at our principal and sometimes I feel like he is more of a CEO of a company in all the things he's got going on, but he has also got to communicate with his administrative team, central office administration, administrative union, the teachers, the teachers' union, parent groups. You know there are ten other groups that he needs to communicate with to make sure that we are all kind of on the same page and that we are all in the same direction.

**B4: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

What I see is, like I said my principal is absolutely fabulous. He's a true teacher, he is teaching me how to how to become a principal. I um, what I

see as one of the most important responsibilities of the principal is creating the culture that you know starts with us sometimes of how the school runs. Um, and that's the little details and the big details, but if the culture of the school is not healthy, safe and productive all of the other stuff can't kind of fall into place. So I feel like I am learning how to be a good leader. Um, and like I said sometimes that is really small details and sometimes they are really big things but they all make a difference in the culture and climate of the school.

**B5: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

Well, I mean in my school um, it's really a dual partnership. I know that in some schools assistant principals are designated as the disciplinarians or they don't handle the academic subjects they handle the related subjects like art and PE and things like that, but here in my district it is really a dual role. Um, like I said earlier I have been assigned to 35 teachers, 3 different, 4 different departments that I oversee and I am in classrooms improving instruction making sure that you know the proper instruction is taking place. Um, we are really big right now with the um, you know teachers doing formative assessment and on the spot assessments as a way to help improve instruction and modify instruction. So for me, it is really just being a co-leader with curriculum and instruction and then my principal and I share the duties of discipline. So it is just, he doesn't expect me to do it all, he is very active and takes an

active role. Um, so it's a partnership you know for my district. I don't know if most people would see it that way. I think that they may see it as more of a disciplinarian and that is all they kind of do, they make sure that fire drills are being run correctly and that the cafeteria, are the kids well behaved in the cafeteria, things like that but um my experience is a little bit different than I think most people's.

So I would say that my main purpose in my district is to be a co-leader with regards to curriculum and instruction and making sure that teachers are, you know, have the necessary tools that they need to deliver purposeful and meaningful instruction and that I am in those classrooms on a weekly basis monitoring instruction and delivery of instruction.

The principal will deal with the heavy stuff when it deals with communication with the superintendent on different issues that are taking place within the district. The principal handles all of those, phone calls if it is a more serious issue regarding, um a concern with a teacher I do handle those, but a lot of times, as most assistant principals experience even though you are doing it and handling it parents prefer to speak to the principal. So it is a shared duty, but the principal in my school you know, he deals with the end results with things and the HIB cases and contacting the homes and you know having to call every person involved in the HIB incident, you know. He deals with some of the more concrete things that

um parents prefer hearing from the principal not the assistant principal a lot of times

**C1: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

I think a principal has to be um, a leader, an educational leader not just somebody who works with only the teachers, or only the parents, or only the students. Somebody who works with all facets of education, which includes all those dimensions. So I think as an assistant principal maybe, I only work with behaviors and some teachers you know, my cohort of teachers and then the parents of course get mixed in there of course, but, um, a principal has a more global vantage point where they get to sort of work with multiple facets and make connections between them. So that and so I think that is one of the more, a different piece you know and obviously that includes budgeting and scheduling and includes some of the logistical pieces of being a school leader and so I think that might be the most important.

And I also think that I have learned that to be visible in the classroom and in the community and that those are two important pieces I think of as being a principal.

**C2: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

The most important job of a principal I think they have to be, and in no particular order, I think they have to be very knowledgeable on not just



what's happening in their building but what's happening in education and to know their community um that have to know their BOE and they not necessarily have to have direct contact with, but they have to be in touch with all of the elements that make up the district. Um, including their students. I think they have to be good managers. They have to be organized. I think that they have to be organized and have follow through and have strong pre-planning and execution and debriefing. They have to measure what they are doing and make informed decisions. I could probably go on for an hour and a half if you would like me to. You know as far as characteristics go, I think two loosely go hand in hand but as far as characteristics go, I think a natural leader, but I think a good leader is someone who is great with people and somebody who is not overly ridged, um has a strong vision and is able to communicate that vision. Um can deal with the day-to-day trials and tribulations. You know, has an even temper and again a very strong content knowledge.

**C3: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

Communication um problem solving, knowing who to go to for help and being able to be humble enough to reach out to your colleagues and other administrators for assistance to find better ways and easier ways to do things that's part of communication, I guess.

**C4: Question 3: What are the most important job requirements of a principal?**

I would say communication is important because you have to develop relationships, you have to develop sound relationships with kids and sound relationships with families teachers and everything because you're sometimes the go between, um, I would say communication would be up there as a priority.

**Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

**A1:** I would say one of the most difficult tasks is dealing with difficult students and families when there is a problem and being able to honestly um deal with the problem so that the families understand what's going on and the students do in a productive way so you can guide the families and students so that you can prevent or mitigate what is happening. I find that to be the most challenging.

**Moderator:** Give a little more on that, dealing with difficult families, would you rank that as number one as the most difficult task for a principal? Could you give me in your opinion what the second most difficult task is.

**A1:** For me personally, facilities, we don't have the facilities that we need to do what we need to do and there is not a lot that we can do about that. I can't come in earlier tomorrow to add a new classroom or two on. Umm, we don't have the space that we need, we don't have the storage that we

need and we have to work very creatively. Teachers have to be really flexible and cooperative with each other just to be able to do what we need to do to get done and it is really not optimal in that way. So I would say that would be my second biggest challenge.

**A3:** My perspective is because I am somewhat limited on this experience; I believe her most difficult task, if I were to take over that position right now, would be the budgeting aspect of it. Because I don't have the experience working with the budget, I work with the budget of \$170,000 within a school, but I don't have to divvy up those funds, the funds come to me and I disperse them. So the way I perceive her position, that would be the one I would be most fearful of. Umm not fearful, but the one I would be most ignorant towards if and when I get a principal position, that's how I view it

Dealing with difficult parents I believe umm that, when they complain about the assistant principals she gets those calls and she has to be in that role. Same thing, supporting the assistant principal, supporting the child and being in a difficult, she is in a pickle. She has got to support whatever decision was made or fix it. Personally the most difficult task she has in my current view is the budget aspect.

**A1:** Can I clarify my answer? I guess I really didn't mean that dealing with difficult families, I meant dealing with a difficult situation. Where maybe the family is not difficult, but the situation is. Like, for example, we have a student that we think can't be allowed to ride the bus anymore and it is very difficult for the family because they now have to find someone to bring him. So it's challenging, we are trying to help the student change his behaviors so we can get him back on the bus and I don't know if we can do that and that is really challenging. I mean there are those families that make the situation worse, but I meant more challenging issues or behaviors we are trying to solve.

**A2:** I would think that probably the biggest challenge is umm dealing with emails and all this stuff that keeps you in your office. I feel a strong leader is a person who is around the school building, who is visible, getting into teacher's classrooms and umm sometimes I think principals are bogged down with a lot of minutia from parents, from central office. I think communication is hard. We need the support from central office administrators as well as clear communication and sometimes that is not always prevalent. Umm, especially as we have a new regime starting. Umm, I think that as they are learning, we are learning and I think that sometimes trying to keep all of the balls up in the air umm without all of them falling down is hard because we are trying to umm keep moving forward on a lot of the initiatives, new curriculum, the budget. You know,

training, whatever is coming down the pike, even these new evaluation systems and making it all manageable and work but having their support and providing adequate training for the teachers so we don't have to do it and keep giving up you know solid time.

**B1: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

The most difficult duties I would say are dealing with unreasonable parents. I think that's from what I've experienced in the past two years for myself and the principal. You know we are all trying to make decisions to help students be successful and I think sometimes when we are dealing with the parents who are so emotionally tied to their student, the decisions and the reactions of the parents to what they think is going to be best for their child is not what is really best for their child, in the big picture. So dealing with, um parents, I would think is the most difficult part of the job.

**B2: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

I guess I would say, um working with teachers who are not up to the level or up to the expectations that we want or at the place we want them to be and they're tenured. So we are going to have them for a while, can't get rid of them so we are going to have to sort of move them along the continuum. We want to do that in a way that they cannot impact students, but at the end of the day, I have to, we have to put kids in their classes. So

sort of communicating that message, having a conversation and then doing something about it. So the follow-up, um you know getting in their classrooms and seeing what is going on. So I think working with a teacher who (a) could be difficult or (b) does not have the capacity to sort of do the work that we are asking them to do.

**Moderator:** So dealing with difficult teachers and the way we are structured, it is difficult to get rid of tenured staff.

**B2:** Yeah exactly, I think sort of stems from the principal. You know as an assistant, I can only do so much if the principal is not on board.

**Moderator:** What would you say the next most difficult task is of a principal?

I guess from a systems perspective, you want to dedicate your time and dedication and your resources to curriculum and instruction teaching and learning all though other things that come into play um a master schedule, working with support staff, just making sure that the day-to-day things run. From like a systems perspective. So I guess I would say balancing the time and the things you want to do, the things that you are passionate about and just the things that you have to do in terms of like paperwork and um and you know things like that.

**B3: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

I have to say time, you would know, when you come down to it, there is never enough time in the day to do the things that you need to do. Um, so I guess time management probably sometimes would be the most difficult thing. You're talking about that kind of standpoint? In other situations, I would say personnel decisions sometimes are tough decisions to make. You know whether or not you are going to rehire a person, you need to fire a person, let someone go, um creating an action plan for a teacher, those are some of the things that are, aside from the individual things, the idea of time management the things within the facility to me that would be some of the tougher decisions to make.

**B4: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

Um, I think that there is paperwork that sometimes can be a big part of the job. Um, and I have kind of learned over the last two years in trying to be out and about with the students and being valuable during the day and doing the paperwork during the off times. Because it would be very easy and, I am sure that a lot vice principals feel the same way, that there is always paperwork to be done. So, if you let that consume your day you would never leave your office. Um that's not my personal philosophy, I would like to be out and about when the kids are here between 8:31 and 3:01 and then do the paperwork during the times when you know there aren't students at the school. Um, and sometimes that translates into some

late nights or work on the weekends but I feel like there is always going to be paperwork that needs to be done. Um and there is always going to be the time of responding to emails. You can't let that consume your day, you have to almost consciously say, I'll stand up and walk around the school, do a loop around the school just to see what is going on to be valuable and available to the students. My door is always open, so there is always a lot of interruptions but I think there is definitely a lot of paperwork that needs to be done, that always will be there.

**B5: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

I think that one of the most difficult duties of the principal, I mean there are a few. Just off the top of my head, it is just making sure that the curriculum, I mean for me in the middle school, it is making sure that curriculum is aligned from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Making sure that the teachers are teaching to the standards. Um, making sure that the teachers are differentiating instruction and meeting the needs of all learners. You know those types of things. And that is a big job, I mean a school such as mine with almost 1,000 kids, you know 75-80 teachers, um about 70 teachers I believe it is a big task and attending team meetings. I think being a part of team meetings, sitting down with the teachers and taking an active interest in what they are doing and providing them with the leadership that they need. I think that is one of the most challenging and difficult tasks as well as the most important tasks.



And then you know keeping your stakeholders, keeping all of your stakeholders in the loop. I am in a pretty demanding district so parents what to know what the heck is going on. These parents what to know what is happening in the school. So that is a lot of work that is a lot of work on the principal's part. I mean sending out the weekly email and at the same time connecting with your staff, you know to let them know that you care about them and that you are interested in them and that you are there for them, you know it is a challenging job, it is not easy by any means you know.

**C1: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

I think being visible is the most difficult. Um, it's so easy to sit down and take care of the paperwork during the 9, I wish it was 9, during the 7 to 3 time period, it is so easy to say I am going to write this report now and it is harder to say I am going to write that report at three o'clock. Um, and that also means sacrifices to life because life for you also starts at three o'clock and so how you manage to balance that, that has been something that I have been challenged with my whole career because you only get face time with the kids you know um from seven to three and how you balance that with your responsibilities of getting your tasks done. While I think it is very important to be visible, I think it is also very challenging.

**C2: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

You know, I think that the notion that the buck stops with you outside of the superintendent is in it self pretty daunting. I think that's when your knowledge of a particular law or policy or procedure or your gut instinct on what's best for a child comes to play. And as an assistant principal, you can rely on the fact that you can call the principal, you can call the superintendent and get their opinion on things. I think that one of the best, to go back to the earlier questions, forgive me, I think but because the fact that it is so daunting it is critical that a principal be able to pull on the strengths of his or her team.

**C3: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

For principals, I would say the political nature of the job could be tiring, um, I would also imagine that the human resource piece in reprimanding and dealing with you know people the same age or younger than your teachers in the building and do that in a professional way could be very challenging.

**C4: Question 4: What are the most difficult duties/tasks of a principal?**

I guess the most difficult task is delivering bad news um to students or families um sometimes you know discipline and tough love aspect of our job, you know is difficult um so

**Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

**A2:** I think that one of the big things that I hear in talking, and even my colleagues say, that one of their main factors might have been financial gain. Umm, I think that the second factor would be what you asked in question one is the reasons that you know the belief in education, the belief in working in a different factor not just with kids but with adults as well.

**Moderator:** What inspires assistant principals to move toward principal?

**A2:** I also think that it is your prior experiences because perhaps you have known someone in your life who really impacted you in a certain way. Umm, I think of my current principal and just as a beginning teacher, she hired me and now I have the fortune to work under her and learn from her and just being, she is a mentor and that just makes me want to aspire to move further in my career as well, I think it is good.

**A3:** In my particular situation, I learned by watching and as I said that I learned a lot from different supervisors. I'm learning a lot by watching principals. The current principal that I work with and I can be her, I feel I have learned a lot from her and I continue to grow and umm so just trying to see where my next step is, because even though I might be older than some I am always ready to look for what is next for me. So I am looking what's next for me, and money in every position I took has always been a reduction in pay. So money did not motivate me and it will probably be a reduction in pay if I do get a principalship outside of my district.

**A2:** That is true, at first when I took this position (referring to AP)

**A1:** I have to say honestly, I'm not sure what motivates other people. There is probably a lot of different factors I only know what motivated me and it seemed to be the natural step. It just came next, sort of like you mastered teaching so what are you going to do with that and just kind of moving on. I think a lot of umm people that I have met who are administrators are kind of in that boat, they've just been such good teachers that they are ready to move on to sort of the next level and kind of share that part.

**A2:** it's like that seven-year itch almost where you want to move on.

**A3:** Yeah once you're done you're like OK now what's next.

**A1:** Right.

**A3:** What else can I do?

**A2:** And some people mention that because it's the natural step, but also the advancement on the guide on the scale because I've taken my masters degree in this what else can I get my next masters degree in? Oh, let's do administration. Some people use it, some people don't you know, but I think its great background even as a teacher to have a lot of that different information you get.

**B1: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

I currently don't have any aspirations to become a principal at this point, I still feel that I am in a learning phase. Um, why do most people want to become a principal? I think certain people like to lead. I think that, um, being the educational leader of a school would be a motivation. I think from a financial, um point of view some people might want to do it because of the increase in salary. Um, I think some people have a philosophy of service and understand the importance of education and how it impacts communities and the nation and their influence and the impact they can make, um by having a role that by that could improve the level of education of students, I guess that's about it.

**B2: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

Um, I think one of the factors could be assistant principals realize that, that's what they are, they are assistants to their principals. And I think they realize that, um you know, maybe they have their own ideas and they maybe would do something a little differently and they um, realize that in the role that they are in they maybe cannot do that. So they want to do it so they sort of move on to put themselves in a position where they can do it. So they don't have to go to someone who they have to go to for all their things they have a little bit more, I guess flexibility and kind of bond their vision and what they think, you know how a school should run. I think eventually there comes a point where assistant principals get frustrated in terms of you know, I can only do so much here so I am going to move on. I think eventually, I think for the most part people come into the position knowing that they eventually they want to lead their own school. So this is a great way to sort of practice, build up some level of experience and sort of take that knowledge base, take all those experiences and move on and apply them in their own setting.

**B3: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

I think you look at, it comes down to the idea of leadership. Are you a person that wants to be a leader, a person that eventually one day wants to

run your own building? You know, I say to myself, do I have the qualities to run a school effectively? I think you need to have examples whether it is through your teaching experiences or your administrative experience. Things that you have seen from your previous principals, good bad or indifferent, and you reflect on those things, how would I handle that, how would I do that? Um, again I think it is the idea of ambition, the idea of leadership. Ultimately thinking that I am a person that is going to make the decisions for our school. I am a person that obviously is going to make the kids the first priority. I work with the stakeholders involved to do everything we can to make this place as successful as possible. You know, we want our kids to succeed, we want them to do well, we want them to be prepared when they leave us. We want our teachers to understand that they are supported and encouraged to become better professionals. You know from top to bottom, everybody within a school, whether it is building and grounds, the cafeteria ladies, the families that are involved. I think that's it, ultimately you determine, you get a feeling, is that what I want to do? And I think as a leader that is what we do think. I am a person who is going to be able to make the right decisions and put the people in the right places to make those around me successful. I think that is why we one day strive to run our own buildings.

**B4: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

Um, well really, I think that being an assistant principal you are being trained to be a principal. Um, I have had discussions with my boss that that's really my ultimate goal. You don't want to die a vice principal. You're being trained to be a principal some day whatever that day may be, it might be five years, it might be ten years, it might be twenty years, but at some point you are being trained to be the principal. Um, I know, I think that we had great conversations about what our core values are and our beliefs and that's what kind of runs the school when you go back to that vision statement. That is how you are making decisions and that has to be a solid kind of foundation, you have to know your core beliefs and values. I am very lucky where I am now, the team, the administrative team I am on, we are all very much aligned. It is a very productive environment where we have good discussions, and talk about, sometimes being new, did you think of this, have you, when we are making decisions well here is the flip side to that, what if this happens, have you thought about the perspective from the parent and that is really the learning curve. For me, when you are new, you really don't think of all those things. Where an experienced principal can sometimes say, hey, this is what I experienced over the years and you almost start to get your little own tool box, not necessarily how to handle every little case because there is always something new that comes up, but I have handled something



similar to this whether. It can be a student cheating, whether it be an HIB issue. You know you start to acquire how you handled different situations in the past and how you handle them moving forward to be fair and safe for everybody.

**B5: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

You know, I think it is gaining the confidence of your current staff and I think, for me, you know, I am fortunate to have a very good staff, a very supportive staff and you know that when they tell me that I am doing things right. I have teachers that have been around for a long time, you know 20 years of service and when you have veteran teachers come up to you and say you know that you're doing a great job or we appreciate this or you have what it takes. When you get some of that positive feedback from teachers that you are doing a good job, for me, that is a motivating factor and I know that I have the potential to go to the next step of actually having my own building. Then getting back to the first question, it's just advancing in your career. I find it hard, I mean the principal that I work for, I think he is fantastic, I think he is motivated, he's a hard worker, he is inspirational and I can definitely see myself working under him for, you know five years maybe more, but you know, I am learning a lot from him and taking a lot in from him and that motivates me to want to have my own building. You know, and do what he is doing and to

teach somebody underneath me and so the fact that I have such a strong principal and someone that I respect, that's a motivating factor for me to want to do what he is doing and then again its money. It comes down to, it's money you want to make more money. When you put in the same amount of time and you put in the same amount of dedication as your principal, and you are making a significantly less amount of money, you know 30,000 40,000 less, that's a pretty good motivating factor to want to move up the chain.

**C1: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

That is a hard question for me to answer because I am not motivated to do that (This AP wants to go into central office).

I think what motivates them is a strong partnership between them, the assistant principal and the principal, effective communication between them, shared responsibility, not just saying I do this and you do this and I will see you at the end point. Sort of talking along the way, which I have a whole bunch of in my building I don't want to sound ungrateful. My principal has been very kind and very cooperative and inclusive of me in the process, but I still have these endeavors and goals to get into central office leadership.

**C2: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

I will speak from only my own experiences. I think that as I become more comfortable with my position as an assistant principal, I find that more and more I watch what my principal does and think, not that I disagree with what he is doing, but there are times that I think I would do things differently and I feel confident that the way I would do it would work best for me. Again, not that it is better or worse, but better for me. And I think personally, as I have those feelings more and more, then perhaps I am ready to jump into position. For me, that has been the catalyst that motivates me to perhaps some day have my own building and be a principal.

**C3: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

Um, I think in an abrupt perspective, it usually was done for financial reasons. People I have known who have taken that step will also talk about getting the financial gains but I don't think that exists any more. Either principals I have spoken to in district and out don't seem to think that's, don't seem to think it counts because it is not going to be very big at all any more. So, um, I think it is good to be more egocentric, you think you can change things, you think you can do things better which has already been stated,

You know, like fulfilling that what you are supposed to do, that drive, that goal that you might have had when you started that trip, building in a certain way change kids and make it a great place for teachers. I think that most people had the original vision so fulfilling that dream.

**C4: Question 5: What are the factors that motivate and inspire Assistant Principals to pursue employment as a Principal?**

I think, in the past, the motivating factor used to be finances but I think that factor is not there anymore. I think it is actually a deterrent right now, but I would say probably from my perspective, the biggest factor would be just thinking that you can do things better or wanting to do things different maybe than in your current, you know, just building that confidence in yourself that you think, I can do this or I can do this differently or better and be successful.

I think that just some people just want to continue to you know, their growth in education um, they are at a certain level and they want to make things better for you know an institution.

**Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

**A2:** I think that one thing may be the confidence that umm some people may feel that they are not ready at this point. Umm, if they were put in that role sometimes they see what the current administrators do and feel, oh, I don't know if I can handle a parent or budgets are not my thing, or how do I put it all together? They also see that it is a very big time commitment. So some people who have families say, can I really do that forcibly at this point in life for my career? Umm, it's a lot of work and I think as we move forward in the years there is going to be a lot more accountability for administrators, for the schools. There is so much that, you know, there is a big lens on us now, that and I think that, umm, sometimes that scares people, you know. Everybody says we get perks, but I don't know that they necessarily see the perks in life right now. Umm, but I think that most people who have really have that vision are going to go for it. We have people that who you know, interview a lot and you know they are just waiting for that right fit, maybe they are not just a perfect fit for a certain school or environment, but maybe its just about finding it.

**A3:** I think that some of the factors that might deter some people from using their administrative degree, if they are going to use it at all, is confidence. See, what I find is that people who have the degree aren't

ready to make the, they are comfortable in their teaching role and they are, might be great teachers and might be happy being a great teacher and they want to stay that further connected with the children, then let's say an assistant principal or a principal would be. You are still connected with kids, but not on the daily basis. I don't know the students near as well as the teachers do. So I think they are fearful of losing that connection with students because, let's face it, we all went into education to be with the kids, if you didn't like kids, you wouldn't be in education. So I think they are fearful of that and I think what they view when they come through the office and they see kids crying or kids or parents upset they see the negative side of administrative role, they might not want to deal with that, but I think they might be fearful of not being connected with kids as closely.

**A2:** Also, you are moving into a non-tenured position again and some people don't want to take that risk. Umm, because they are tenured in their current role and they think that might be a security, you know, financially, they might be a little cautious at this time.

**A1:** One thing I noticed when I was in graduate school getting my administrative certification, there were a number of students who were there to get the degree for the jump on the salary grid and they really

weren't interested in being an administrator so they were just taking it for that so I would say that's why probably why they don't do it.

Secondly, I think the time commitment is a big deal. I mean if this was twenty years ago, I definitely would not be working as an administrator.

**A2:** Its hard (time)

**A3:** Right (time)

**A1:** I could take my papers home and correct them on the weekends and I think that in elementary, where I am, um, I think that a lot of people that come into elementary are very nice, nurturing, sensitive people and maybe don't see themselves, or maybe aren't' ready for situations that they see are as more negative rather than being the classroom teacher that the parents really like you and then when something is bad, they come to the administrator. I think that we have a lot of personalities that just aren't interested in dealing with those kinds of situations.

**A2:** That's a hard part when they realize they have to be the bad guy. That all of a sudden, I have to write up a teacher, all of a sudden this person who I have maybe been a colleagues or a friend in the past that you know, how do I tell somebody, "No?" Oh somebody needs to go out

for a doctor's appointment and you're doing it every day or you are late every day, how do I write people up? So, I think sometimes that is eye opening for people when they realize that.

**A1:** I did work in business for about ten years, I hired and fired people so to me, that was not something, I mean it was difficult when I had to do it when I was in my twenties, but it made it a lot easier to deal with people in that managerial way now.

**B1: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

Um, for some people it might be a family commitment, where they are as far as their family. It could be the spouse, or the children. It could be that somebody doesn't want to make a time commitment. I think, for me personally, I think, like I said before, I still have a lot of learning to do.

Um, because there are so many aspects to the job that you need to be proficient in that, um, certain people, like myself, may feel that they want to become better at different topics, whether it would be scheduling or budgeting or dealing with the public or the politics of the position.



**B2: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

Um, it's a huge responsibility, you know, I think. Um, I think some people may be just sort of be content being an assistant principal and sort of fulfilling their passion working with kids, and you know, being financially rewarded for that but um, I think people realize that being a principal is a big responsibility, so maybe they don't want all that responsibility that sort of comes along being sort of the last, being the main person in charge. It is a huge time commitment. I think that sometimes that can be, in terms of a work-life balance, and I think some people can be sort of be content and not have the motivation to sort of move on.

**B3: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

It's funny because I used to coach a lot and I think that you see a lot of similar things with the coaching and the idea of new accountability, new things that coming up that we are held accountable for. Whether it is, more specific evolutionary, you know the evaluation tools, budgeting, test scores. You know, it is tough, you do your best and sometimes you're working hard and you get in a particular situation, where maybe a certain aspect that's not meeting expectations you hear it. You know, um, it is almost, at times, it feels like a thankless position. So, I think the amount

of responsibility that is placed on people sometimes is a deterrent. You know some people, I just talked about being leaders, are you ready for that responsibility? You know, there are some people that are going to look at it as perhaps a stepping stone and they are not ready for that responsibility and I think ultimately that is going to be a deterrent.

**B4: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

Um, why do I think that people wouldn't want to be a principal? Um, I think that it is a lot of responsibility and some people are OK with just staying comfortable. That's personally, not my philosophy. When I was a teacher, I was always trying to become a better teacher, now that I am an assistant principal, I am trying to become better. I learn something new every day, so I can't say, I can't imagine that in ten years, or how ever many years I feel like at a certain point, you say, OK I've learned what it is that I wanted to learn as a vice principal, I want to learn something now more and become a principal. I mean I know there certainly are things that I don't do. So I don't do the fall report, I don't do the budgeting, that's really the principal's job, but some day I, when I know my job inside and out, I might want to have new challenges. I think that for some people they are OK and I also think that where you are in life. Like when I entered this profession, I am lucky that I can give the time. I think that it is a big time commitment. Some people might say, hey, I have a family

and I'm not ready to become a principal yet because I can't commit to everything single night for meetings. Um, I think the time commitment is big and I think that for some people, if they are comfortable, they are OK with that. Like I said, that is not me, I look forward to going back to school and continuing to grow and learn, but I think that maybe the responsibility that comes with being a principal, now with the new laws and stuff people might say, I don't want that. I'm OK being a vice principal. Even though we still have the same responsibilities and it usually comes back to the whole team.

**B5: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

Well, there is a lot of them out there now. We deal with you know, we deal with the whole New Jersey harassment, intimidation, bullying law. You talk to a lot of people I mean, I have a handful of teachers in my school that say to me you know what I don't think I want to deal with what you guys deal with, you know it seems like you are constantly on the phone with parents you know, and you are constantly dealing with bullying situations because of the new law.

Um, and just the demand of the parents. I think that is one of the most deterring factors, you know being a principal, assistant principal. Being a principal is a lot different than twenty, twenty-five, thirty years ago. I

mean now with the Internet and all the technology. I mean things are now just right at our finger tips and parents are now will just contact you within a second and just their expectations, it is like they expect a response immediately and I think if you don't know how to budget your time and prioritize and take a deep breath and really see what's most important and see what do I really need to address first, I think that it could be a very difficult and overwhelming job and I think that's a big deterrent is that you know you have some teachers that say I can teach and I can pick up a few extracurricular activities. I could coach a couple teams, I could do the fall drama and I can do this and I can make just about the same amount of money as the assistant principal, at least in my district and it's true. I mean I was, before I became an assistant principal with my coaching duties and my summer job, I was probably making just as much money as I am now as a second year assistant principal. But again, I think it just comes down to what type of person you are and how much drive you have and for me again one of the motivating factors was wanting to be a leader of a school and run a system. You know it's a challenge it is exciting you know, I could have stayed in the classroom and coached sports and probably right now maybe made the same amount of money, but I know down the road, I am going to advance and set myself up for you know a nice retirement and a nice pension because you know, all those sports and things are not pensionable and so I have also looked at the long term. I mean, I still have another twenty good years left

in me, but I try and look at the long term and see if I start my principalship early, it will benefit me you know 20, 25 years from now.

**C1: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

I think that um, for me, what's been hard for me in moving further is separating further from the students. Because sometime when you move to the upper tiers, you lose involvement one-on-one with younger people and it is more involvement with them as, let's say as an ID number, or you know, or as a demographic these are my group of folks who are in this group whether it is an academic content group or a social economic group or a racial group or whatever it might be. You don't, I don't always see my principal knowing our children the way I might know them, or the way that my staff might know them. You know, and I think that will become more and more of a downfall for me because I love working with young people. Um, as I move hopefully to the upper ranks of public education. So I think that is kind of for me that is definitely makes me want to stay here and not move um, but then I obviously have the goal of moving to upper leadership, so yeah.

**Moderator:** Can I ask a side question? Do you think that being in central office, you are going to have even less time with the children than you would as a principal?

**C1:** Oh yeah, Oh yes, and that is something that I have to grapple with, in which I prefer for me, and my strengths.

**C2: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

Perhaps being nervous or anxious about him or her being the only, the top dog in the building. To have the greatest responsibility to fall on their shoulders. To have the most eyes watching that person as a principal. As an assistant principal, there is a certain protection. Yes, you are in the spotlight for certain things, but everyone knows that you are the assistant principal. Um, but the principal has the responsibility of being the face of the building and in some cases the face of the district, if it is a one school district. For some people, they may not feel cut out for that. They may like their administrative tasks as an assistant principal, but you know, when the limelight is more focused on them that might not be the best thing. Um, it could be a question of lack of confidence that although they do the assistant principal job quite well and they understand their duties they may not feel all that confident, even though they had been trained and they have been certified to be a principal. They don't feel confident in their ability to bring that content to light as a principal, you know, their knowledge of a policy, a law or a procedure.

**C3: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

I think, um, well politically things have changed. As for job security wise, evaluation systems for administrators, you are leaving a secure place as being an AP. There are not financial incentives any more, so another factor to take that risk weighs in on it. Um, so I think there are a lot of conversations that happen amongst assistant principals, is it worth it, is it worth taking that risk, for a 1,000 more. Then, if you have family or even if you don't, um, the amount of hours you might be working for that extra 500 dollars a month you are giving up your security. There is a lot of negative perceptions out there about the risks you will take to leave an AP job for a principalship, so you sort of bounce back and forth with at times.

**C4: Question 6: What factors do qualified candidates view as major deterrents to applying for a Principalship?**

The unknown, the unknown of the culture, the town, the politics and I think job security would need to be mentioned because, when you leave a secure place in which you know and love, taking that jump and maybe it not be a good fit, could be frightening, it's a risk.

**Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**

**A3:** I believe, I feel like I'm going to be pursuing a principal position some of the factors and some of the difficult things about being tied to the desk, I feel with the help or the hiring or the training of the proper people that work around you that could be alleviated for you. I view, my philosophy is that we are all equal, the principal is the same as the assistant principal, is the same as the custodian, the same as the secretary, the teachers. We just have different job responsibilities. So, if a principal values everybody's contributions as to how that school runs with the help of everybody's role, they will be able to get out of their office and trust that things are getting done.

Trust is a whole other issue. You have to trust the people you work with and if you can't trust them, you have to work on the relationships. So you can build the trust, so you can do certain things. I'm not sure that I answered your total question, though.

**Moderator:** Are you interested in becoming a principal?

**A3:** I am interested in becoming a principal sooner rather than later.



**Moderator:** Why

**A3:** Because I think that I can do that at this point. I learned what it's like. The support of the assistant principal's role is and how important that job is to keep that school running and following to some kind of level of consistency. So I understand what it is like to be an assistant principal and I understand what it is like to be a teacher. I actually come from a family of a secretary and a custodian. So, I know what the importance of those roles are, so I am ready to take on the next role. So I am ready to become a principal, where is yet to be seen, and when.

**A2:** I hope to be pursuing a principalship in the near future. Umm, I think the things that motivate me is that as an assistant principal you learn from your principal, but then you also generate ideas of your own, and you say to yourself what is it going to feel like to have your own building or your own school and what would happen if we tried this and what if we did this. So, I think it would just be to have some of those ideas come to fruition. Umm, to continue from some of the answers that we just said, you know working with the teachers, working with them at a different level. Umm, trying to find that balance between being the managerial person verses being a visionary person who is in the classroom doing a lot of different things. Umm, I think it is a rewarding position because I think you are able to have influence over many different areas, you know,

whether it is the students, the parents, curriculum, many different areas  
umm, so, I hopefully will be doing that.

**A1:** I plan to pursue a principalship in the future. Who knows when?

Umm, but I think that I am viewing that in the same way that I viewed going from teacher to administrator is, I am learning as I go and umm, I am constantly making umm, ideas. I shouldn't say making ideas, creating ideas, coming up with ideas about how I would do this, how I would do that. Umm, kind of coming up with my own vision of the way I would do it when I was principal and so, that just kind of comes natural and in time, I will be a ready to implement those things.

**B1: Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**

This is my opinion? For me currently, I like my role as a vice principal and I currently don't have any aspirations to become a principal at this point, whether that may be true down the road, I don't know. I like, um, I still feel that I am in a learning phase and I still feel that I have a lot more learning to do before I could assume that role.

**B2: Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**

I am interested in pursuing that eventually. Um, I think to motivate me it's the kind of thing that I see this as training to do that. I think, logically to me, that that's the next step. That is why I went back to graduate school. That's kind of what I am passionate about, so I feel I want to apply a lot of these things that I'm seeing here that I have gathered from experiences and watching other people and sort of apply to my own school one day. Um, on the other respect, I think for me it could be a work-life balance in terms of I would imagine the dedication and time that goes into running your own school. So, for me, I think the negative would be right now at this point in my life would be the work-life balance.

**B3: Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**

I am definitely interested in becoming a principal. Some of my motivations are similar to the ideas I discussed before. Some ambition but I also feel I am a person who is going to make decisions that are going to help all parties be successful. Sometimes you are going to make tougher decisions people aren't going to be happy, but ultimately the goal is to make sure that we're creating the best opportunities for our kids to succeed. We want to put them in the best possible situation. So I look

forward to the opportunity to become a principal. Um, you know, I have been able to communicate effectively with people here at our school. The parents, booster clubs, those sorts of things. So I think that I have the necessary tools. Obviously, you still have a lot to learn. My principal is going into his 35<sup>th</sup> year in education and his 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> year as a principal and you know, it is something that we discuss all the time, is making sure you have an open mind and are ready to learn new things.

**Moderator:** When do you think you will actively start looking for a position as principal?

**B3:** I have been in my position now for two years, going on in my second year. I think in the Spring I will start snooping around and just keeping an eye open to see if there is a good opportunity. I give myself four to five years in this particular position before I would be more aggressive. I plan on this spring sending out some feelers keeping my eyes open. Ultimately it would be really great if something in the district opened up. The position I am in now is a great opportunity that came up I was a teacher in the district and I was right for this particular spot and it would be nice if something opened up either the 56 school or one of the elementary schools. I would keep it middle school and below, I don't think I am ready for a high school yet. I think you definitely have to work your way up to that.

**B4: Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**

Yes, and that is not necessarily today. I think I am still learning all, everything I can from my current principal, but I diffidently someday see myself as a principal, Um, I am very lucky, I love the district that I work in so I would like to grow in my district. I think that how a school is run and the culture of a school can really make your experience either very positive or very negative. In the NJL2L program, it is very interesting to me to hear how very different schools are run and how different administration is. And I feel very lucky where I am, I am very happy and I learn every single day. I would like to be a principal and I think that at a certain point you just know you are ready. I don't know when that point will be, but I could see myself being a principal of a school and I look forward to that challenge. Not yet though.

**B5: Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**

I am, I think um, I feel that in year two of my administrative career I am more prepared than I was in year one and partly it is because of the principal that I work for. Um, in year one I worked for a principal that retired, so she unexpectedly retired so she came back after Christmas and said I am done and so I was only five months into my administrative

career and so I didn't learn so much. Last year, I was more on the job learning. I was required to do a lot and didn't have the experience, so I learned on the job and so when she retired, the superintendent brought me in which I thought was very nice, and she said listen because you don't even have years of service you only have months, you are doing a great job, keep doing what you are doing but, I can't recommend you for a principal of a building and I understood that and I got it and they brought in a guy a younger guy, that's been in the district for six years now as an administrator and you know, it has been a fantastic experience you know, like I said he is a really bright guy and really great to work for and um, now working for him for a half a year, you know seeing what he does and knows and seeing what I am learning from him, it motivates me to hopefully start my principalship earlier than when I planned, you know, my original plan was to be an assistant principal for 5 to 10 years and maybe finish up my career as principal where as now, I hope to become a principal of a building within the next two to three years, because, as I said earlier, I see that I can do the job. You know, I know I have a lot to learn, but in anything else like a lot of us we learn on the job but I have the right person that I am working for now. I have the right support, I am confident that I can do this job and do a pretty good job based on the feedback from my teachers. So I am not deterred at all um, there is nothing that is deterring me from becoming a principal or anything that makes me feel you know, why don't you just stay an assistant principal

for the next 25 years. It's just, I don't know I don't know if there are many people like that out there, but then there may be. This is why you are doing your research you know, but not for me. I want to keep moving up the chain and hopefully that will happen.

**C1: Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**

For me I think that um, I have more dominance and one of my strengths and one of the reasons why I pursued my PhD in curriculum and instruction is because I work well with how to manipulate a curriculum to be inclusive of all. I think of most perspectives. I would not say all perspectives, because that would be lying, but I think I do a nice job of including both perspectives of curriculum work particularly for mathematics and science. Um, and those are places that I see a real need to be cognizant of the individual um, and make them more culturally responsive so those are places where I want to try to get into central office curriculum and instruction work and then the second, I think you said why I didn't want to do a principalship and that is because um, in principal work, I think there is less curriculum and instruction work than there is in this work that I do because at least I get a cohort of teachers that I get to supervise and work directly with and a principalship um, that's not always the case.

**C2: Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**

Um, my eyes are open for a position right now. Um and I have applied most recently for positions, so I would tell you that I am actively looking for the right fit, but I am in no hurry whatsoever. If I am in this role for the next three, four, five years I wouldn't be miserable. Yes, I am the type of person looking to be a principal at some point. I will be honest with you and say not always do I feel 100% confident that I can do the job well as a principal. There are some days that I go home and say gosh, I could have done what my principal did today and I will be just fine. You know, my content knowledge is strong and my people skills are good or whatever. And there are days that I feel, gosh let's just keep learning. But there are more and more days that one day I will lead a building with teachers and students and a community of parents which is why I am putting my name out there. I also have a very opinionated wife that loves me to pieces and she really believes that I should put my name out there and she is right, she always is and I think honestly the other reason that I will put my name out there right now is to put my hat in the ring and get my resume prepared and perhaps have interviewing practices, you know, just because that can't hurt.

**C3: Question 7: Are you interested in pursuing a Principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing a Principalship?**



I believe that I will some day mostly for personal reasons, it wouldn't be in the very near future, but I am also hesitant because of the unknown. What I see as the role a lot of principals play would it be as rewarding would it be as rewardable, I used to think it would be is it just about prestige and the money is not really there so I am a little hesitant but I think some day I probably would

**C4: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

Yeah, I am interested in pursuing a principalship, but, you know, for personal reasons not for three or four years and um, as we talked about before I think um, it is a natural progression and you know you get stagnate or you want to continue um, you know I think that will be the case for me in three or four years

**Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

A1: No

A2: No

A3: No

**B1: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

No

**B2: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

Um, no I think, like I said logically, to me, it is rare to me to think that assistant principals wouldn't want to move on. To me, it is a logical next step in the progression. I can't imagine a lot of people take this job being content being an assistant principal their whole life, but I know there are people who are.

**B3: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

No

**B4: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

Um, I think the one factor you can't predict is just the culture and climate of the school. If you have an administration that doesn't communicate, if you have an administration where it is top heavy and the vice principal doesn't have any power to, you know, you might have a totally different experience. I feel very lucky that I am having the experience that I am having, I have a great relationship with my whole administrative team, we have a great relationship with our BOE, but I think in a different situation or a different climate you could have a very negative experience as a vice principal and say, I don't want to move forward with this, this is crazy. I think education has definitely changed over the years, I know that in just the NJL2L program, there's a lot of young vice principals where I feel like many years ago, people weren't becoming principals and staying in

that job for 30 years and not going anywhere. Now there is more change over where you can become a vice principal and in two years you can be a principal. Um, so I definitely think it has changed, but I think that different districts, I am sure that different people would have different experiences and I just feel lucky I am where I am. I just think that it is the culture of the school that makes it, the teachers, you have the students, you have. You know, some schools, I think with all the laws I think that just the society we live in, some vice principals are dealing with discipline all day where they are just trying to keep the peace where that's not my experience. I am very lucky, we have great students, parents that are really involved, Um, I think it's the greatest school in America

**B5: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

Not off the top of my head, honestly, If I do I will email you.

**C1: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

No

**C2: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

No

**C3: Follow-up Question 1: Have we missed anything?**

No

**Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

**A3:** I would say going into a principal position is just like when I initially came into the assistant principal position. I have to be ready to make mistakes and ready to learn from those mistakes and ready to learn from other people. So it might be the difficult things that I might not be exposed to that I have to be able to trust other people, learn from other people. Know where to find, to be resourceful to get through that and to collaborate and trust your peers, the difficult stuff.

**A1:** Some of those difficult things you can't know in advance and you kind of have to figure them out as you go through and that makes them even a bit more challenging.

**A2:** I think you have to hold onto the positives. You have to hold onto what motivated you and what inspired you at every different level. Whether it is teacher, whether it is assistant principal, because if you lose that, I think you become jaded and you become one of those pencil pushers, you know one of those principals you hear about hopefully that you will never be, but you hear about and its just the person who shuts their door and just disappears. Um, there is no future for this school if there is not inspiration. There's no rallying the troops together you know. I agree with 3A, that there is a, to have team work you have to work with

one another, you have to understand relationships and you need to be able to move forward the entire institution.

I guess my question to the researcher would be, have you run into any ideas, you know the things coming down in New Jersey, the changes in tenure laws, the changes in evaluation systems. Have you noticed or has anybody mentioned that I mean because we have this new principal evaluation system coming and it will be assessing all of us as administrators that really holds us truly accountable and sometimes I get a little scared about that. It's like we have to have evidence for every single little thing. Its more than just a little agenda based, you have be on top of your game. You have to know everything and I am always scared. Am I always going to know what I am talking about? You know, I guess that's the tricky part, is just to make sure that I am aware of the changes that happen you know, globally as well as locally in our schools and in our districts and then um, being able to put it all together in a package so that everyone can understand it and move forward with it.

**Moderator:** When we finish this focus group session we can discuss any questions you have for me as the researcher.

**A1:** I remember being in graduate school and I can remember the professor saying whatever you do, don't be an assistant principal for more

than seven years, because you will be stuck there forever. Get out, it's a black hole,

**A2:** That was the mantra of our former central administrator. They said that you need to be out by five years. If you try to move on after that, not only do you become burnt out in that role and you should be moving on, but that people then will say why were you in this position for just so long. You should just naturally want to aspire to move on, although there are days that you always want to be an assistant, because you can always blame the principal.

**A1:** You can pass it over.

**A3:** When there are complaints there is someone in the building that you can say, share it with the principal, express your concerns with the principal.

**B1: Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

It takes confidence and time to learn the skills

**B2: Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

Um, I think that it is most important that um, assistant principals know their role and have that relationship with their principal in terms of how you are splitting up your responsibilities. Um, in terms of who is doing what at the end of the day, you are still an assistant principal and your role is to assist your principal and follow the vision set forth by them. So, I guess the most important thing that we discussed today is that a principal sets the vision for the school and it's the assistant's role and primary responsibility to sort of follow and carry out that vision that was created.

**B3: Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

It's a very difficult job

**B4: Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

Um, I think the most important is probably why I love what I do and what part of the job is most rewarding, because when you have hard days, I still have difficult days, I still have long days, I still have days I go home exhausted, but I love what I do and that's what keeps me, I like coming to work every day. I am passionate about what I do. I am vested in this school, so I want what's best for the students and the families that those

bad days, bad is not the right word, I guess difficult days don't outweigh all of the rewarding days and the great days that I have.

**B5: Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

I think that being a school leader, um is an enormous responsibility. I think that um, not everybody comprehends, I think that people in education, educators get it, but in this day and age in light of the tragedies, school shootings and storms and state standardized tests and mandates and all the different things that are out there, I think that a lot of people don't truly realize the enormous amount of pressure that a good principal, a good school leader has on him or her and that I think that something to be taken out of this interview is something that it's that you have to have pride in your job and you want to be able to do it, you want to be able to do it good and you want to help, you know, the people in your community. And it is a big responsibility and I think a lot of time, in our district just for example, we were designated as a focus school and its because we have a significant difference in our state test scores between our Asian population and African American population and special education population and that, and so, right off the bat, you know, we are monitored from the state this year and that is an enormous amount of pressure that falls solely on the principal. You know, it doesn't fall on the parents or the kids or the teachers for the most part it, it goes on the



principals and the assistant principals shoulders you know so I think in a lot of cases, the school leader is under appreciated and I don't think people realize the amount of pressure that we deal with on a day-to-day basis. It is a very honorable job a tough job you know, but we are in it for a reason you know and we are just trying to do right by kids, right by trying to help your teachers do right by kids.

**C1: Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

I think the most important thing for me is just recognizing the value in the roles of being a principal and assistant principal and not um, sometimes I do that for myself, you know, I got the masters, I wanted a PhD, you know, I got the department chair position, I wanted to be an assistant principal. So I guess recognizing that level and facet of education, including the principal work, is important and valued and hopefully work to be impactful if I were to take that role. So I think in talking with you now it helps me to see that it's part of the puzzle and to not over shadow it with my lofty goals of moving to central office leadership, because it may be a process for me. I am 31 years old, um, and it may be a process for me, I am a younger educational leader and I may need to go through the steps and work through the hierarchy. Um, without always saying I am going to be an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. You know, I might need to spend some time in a principalship, I might

enjoy it. I don't hate being an assistant principal, I just don't know that it suits my strength right now.

**C2: Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

There is so much that goes into the job of being a principal and being a building leader that it is difficult to encapsulate it into a couple of paragraphs. Being prepared. Easy days are easy; it's the tough days that you have to worry about. The tough days may involve contacting lawyers or dealing with very, very angry parents and I think that it is someone able to manage the ups and downs, the highs and lows of the job that is going to be most successful. Um, and while managing that, also being able to bring good solid forward, thinking to the table to push a building forward to be a visionary and to be able to execute that vision

**C3: Follow-up Question 2: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

It's a very difficult and demanding job. All eyes are on you and at times it can be a thankless job.

**C4: Follow-up Question Two: Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important?**

I think that it's all about the kids, it all comes down to why you first started working in education. It's to help the kids.